



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



THE GIFT OF
Fines







The Cenci
Peter Bell the Third
Œdipus Tyrannus
And Other Poems



Francis Hay

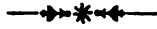
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY
5800 S. UNIVERSITY AVENUE
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637
TEL: 773-936-3700
FAX: 773-936-3701
WWW: WWW.CHEM.UCHICAGO.EDU

RECEIVED
JAN 10 1991
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY
5800 S. UNIVERSITY AVENUE
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637
TEL: 773-936-3700
FAX: 773-936-3701
WWW: WWW.CHEM.UCHICAGO.EDU

The Toast.

"Oh, thou bright wine whose purple splendour leaps."

The Complete Works of
PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY v. 4



T H E C E N C I
AND OTHER POEMS

EDITED BY
Nathan Haskell Dole



Illustrated

London and Boston
Virtue & Company
Publishers

96386

Finis

Copyright, 1905

BY

VIRTUE & COMPANY

2005
30
10
10

LAUREL EDITION

*Limited to One Thousand Copies, of which
this is set*

No.....130.....

Pittsboro;

Contents

	PAGE
THE CENCI	
Dedication	v
Preface	vii
The Cenci	3
Note by Mrs. Shelley	179
<hr/>	
The Mask of Anarchy	193
Note by Mrs. Shelley	217
 PETER BELL THE THIRD	
Dedication	223
Prologue	227
Part the First	231
Part the Second	237
Part the Third	242
Part the Fourth	251
Part the Fifth	259
Part the Sixth	265
Part the Seventh	279
Note by Mrs. Shelley	288
<hr/>	
Letter to Maria Gisborne	293

Contents

	PAGE
THE WITCH OF ATLAS	
To Mary	313
The Witch of Atlas	317
Note by Mrs. Shelley	358
ŒDIPUS TYRANNUS	
Advertisement	365
Œdipus Tyrannus	367
Note by Mrs. Shelley	424

List of Illustrations

	PAGE
The Cenci : The Toast (<i>See page 23</i>)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
The Cenci : Beatrice and Orsino	13
The Cenci : Beatrice in Prison	156
Witch of Atlas	321
Witch of Atlas	337



Dedication

To Leigh Hunt, Esq.



Y DEAR FRIEND:— I inscribe with your name, from a distant country, and after an absence whose months have seemed years, this the latest of my literary efforts.

Those writings which I have hitherto published have been little else than visions which impersonate my own apprehensions of the beautiful and the just. I can also perceive in them the literary defects incidental to youth and impatience; they are dreams of what ought to be, or may be. The drama which I now present to you is a sad reality. I lay aside the presumptuous attitude of an instructor, and am content to paint, with such colours as my own heart furnishes, that which has been.

Dedication

Had I known a person more highly endowed than yourself with all that it becomes a man to possess, I had solicited for this work the ornament of his name. One more gentle, honourable, innocent, and brave; one of more exalted toleration for all who do and think evil, and yet himself more free from evil; one who knows better how to receive, and how to confer a benefit, though he must ever confer far more than he can receive; one of simpler, and, in the highest sense of the word, of purer life and manners I never knew: and I had already been fortunate in friendships when your name was added to the list.

In that patient and irreconcilable enmity with domestic and political tyranny and imposture which the tenor of your life has illustrated, and which, had I health and talents, should illustrate mine, let us, comforting each other in our task, live and die.

All happiness attend you! Your affectionate friend,

PERCY B. SHELLEY.

ROME, *May 29, 1819.*



Preface



MANUSCRIPT was communicated to me during my travels in Italy, which was copied from the archives of the Cenci Palace at Rome, and contains a detailed account of the horrors which ended in the extinction of one of the noblest and richest families of that city during the pontificate of Clement VIII., in the year 1599. The story is, that an old man, having spent his life in debauchery and wickedness, conceived at length an implacable hatred toward his children; which showed itself toward one daughter under the form of an incestuous passion, aggravated by every circumstance of cruelty and violence. This daughter, after long and vain attempts to escape from what she considered a perpetual contamination both of body and mind, at

Preface

length plotted with her mother-in-law and brother to murder their common tyrant. The young maiden, who was urged to this tremendous deed by an impulse which overpowered its horror, was evidently a most gentle and amiable being, a creature formed to adorn and be admired, and thus violently thwarted from her nature by the necessity of circumstance and opinion. The deed was quickly discovered, and, in spite of the most earnest prayers made to the Pope by the highest persons in Rome, the criminals were put to death. The old man had during his life repeatedly bought his pardon from the Pope for capital crimes of the most enormous and unspeakable kind, at the price of a hundred thousand crowns ; the death, therefore, of his victims can scarcely be accounted for by the love of justice. The Pope, among other motives of severity, probably felt that whoever killed the Count Cenci deprived his treasury of a certain and copious source of revenue.¹ Such a story, if told so as to pre-

¹ The Papal Government formerly took the most extraordinary precautions against the publicity of facts which offer so tragical a demonstration of its own wickedness and weakness ; so that the communication of the MS. had become, until very lately, a matter of some difficulty.

Preface

sent to the reader all the feelings of those who once acted it, their hopes and fears, their confidences and misgivings, their various interests, passions, and opinions, acting upon and with each other, yet all conspiring to one tremendous end, would be as a light to make apparent some of the most dark and secret caverns of the human heart.

On my arrival at Rome I found that the story of the Cenci was a subject not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest; and that the feelings of the company never failed to incline to a romantic pity for the wrongs, and a passionate exculpation of the horrible deed to which they urged her, who has been mingled two centuries with the common dust. All ranks of people knew the outlines of this history, and participated in the overwhelming interest which it seems to have the magic of exciting in the human heart. I had a copy of Guido's picture of Beatrice which is preserved in the Colonna Palace, and my servant instantly recognized it as the portrait of La Cenci.

This national and universal interest which the story produces and has produced for two

Preface

centuries and among all ranks of people in a great city, where the imagination is kept for ever active and awake, first suggested to me the conception of its fitness for a dramatic purpose. In fact, it is a tragedy which has already received, from its capacity of awakening and sustaining the sympathy of men, approbation and success. Nothing remained, as I imagined, but to clothe it to the apprehensions of my countrymen in such language and action as would bring it home to their hearts. The deepest and the sublimest tragic compositions, "King Lear" and the two plays in which the tale of Œdipus is told, were stories which already existed in tradition, as matters of popular belief and interest, before Shakespeare and Sophocles made them familiar to the sympathy of all succeeding generations of mankind.

This story of the Cenci is indeed eminently fearful and monstrous: anything like a dry exhibition of it on the stage would be insupportable. The person who would treat such a subject must increase the ideal, and diminish the actual horror of the events, so that the pleasure which arises from the poetry which exists in these tempestuous sufferings and

Preface

crimes may mitigate the pain of the contemplation of the moral deformity from which they spring. There must also be nothing attempted to make the exhibition subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose. The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama, is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge, every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant, and kind. If dogmas can do more, it is well; but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them. Undoubtedly, no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character: the few whom such an exhibition would have interested could never have been sufficiently interested for a dramatic purpose, from the want of finding sympathy in

Preface

their interest among the mass who surround them. It is in the restless and anatomizing casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and their revenge, that the dramatic character of what she did, and suffered, consists.

I have endeavoured as nearly as possible to represent the characters as they probably were, and have sought to avoid the error of making them actuated by my own conceptions of right or wrong, false or true: thus under a thin veil converting names and actions of the sixteenth century into cold impersonations of my own mind. They are represented as Catholics, and as Catholics deeply tinged with religion. To a Protestant apprehension there will appear something unnatural in the earnest and perpetual sentiment of the relations between God and men which pervade the tragedy of the Cenci. It will especially be startled at the combination of an undoubting persuasion of the truth of the popular religion with a cool and determined perseverance in enormous guilt. But

Preface

religion in Italy is not, as in Protestant countries, a cloak to be worn on particular days ; or a passport which those who do not wish to be railed at carry with them to exhibit ; or a gloomy passion for penetrating the impenetrable mysteries of our being, which terrifies its possessor at the darkness of the abyss to the brink of which it has conducted him. Religion coexists, as it were, in the mind of an Italian Catholic, with a faith in that of which all men have the most certain knowledge. It is interwoven with the whole fabric of life. It is adoration, faith, submission, penitence, blind admiration ; not a rule for moral conduct. It has no necessary connection with any one virtue. The most atrocious villain may be rigidly devout, and, without any shock to established faith, confess himself to be so. Religion pervades intensely the whole frame of society, and is, according to the temper of the mind which it inhabits, a passion, a persuasion, an excuse, a refuge ; never a check. Cenci himself built a chapel in the court of his palace, and dedicated it to St. Thomas the Apostle, and established masses for the peace of his soul. Thus in the first scene of the fourth act Lucretia's

Preface

design in exposing herself to the consequences of an expostulation with Cenci, after having administered the opiate, was to induce him by a feigned tale to confess himself before death; this being esteemed by Catholics as essential to salvation; and she only relinquishes her purpose when she perceives that her perseverance would expose Beatrice to new outrages.

I have avoided with great care in writing this play the introduction of what is commonly called mere poetry, and I imagine there will scarcely be found a detached simile or a single isolated description unless Beatrice's description of the chasm appointed for her father's murder should be judged to be of that nature.¹

In a dramatic composition the imagery and the passion should interpenetrate one another, the former being reserved simply for the full development and illustration of the latter. Imagination is as the immortal God which should assume flesh for the redemption of

¹ An idea in this speech was suggested by a most sublime passage in "El Purgatorio de San Patricio" of Calderon; the only plagiarism which I have intentionally committed in the whole piece.

Preface

mortal passion. It is thus that the most remote and the most familiar imagery may alike be fit for dramatic purposes when employed in the illustration of strong feeling, which raises what is low, and levels to the apprehension that which is lofty, casting over all the shadow of its own greatness. In other respects, I have written more carelessly; that is, without an overfastidious and learned choice of words. In this respect I entirely agree with those modern critics who assert that in order to move men to true sympathy we must use the familiar language of men, and that our great ancestors, the ancient English poets, are the writers, a study of whom might incite us to do that for our own age which they have done for theirs. But it must be the real language of men in general and not that of any particular class to whose society the writer happens to belong. So much for what I have attempted; I need not be assured that success is a very different matter; particularly for one whose attention has but newly been awakened to the study of dramatic literature.

I endeavoured whilst at Rome to observe such monuments of this story as might be ac-

Preface

cessible to a stranger. The portrait of Beatrice at the Colonna Palace is admirable as a work of art: it was taken by Guido during her confinement in prison. But it is most interesting as a just representation of one of the loveliest specimens of the workmanship of Nature. There is a fixed and pale composure upon the features: she seems sad and stricken down in spirit, yet the despair thus expressed is lightened by the patience of gentleness. Her head is bound with folds of white drapery from which the yellow strings of her golden hair escape, and fall about her neck. The moulding of her face is exquisitely delicate; the eyebrows are distinct and arched: the lips have that permanent meaning of imagination and sensibility which suffering has not repressed and which it seems as if death scarcely could extinguish. Her forehead is large and clear; her eyes, which we are told were remarkable for their vivacity, are swollen with weeping and lustreless, but beautifully tender and serene. In the whole mien there is a simplicity and dignity which, united with her exquisite loveliness and deep sorrow, are inexpressibly pathetic. Beatrice Cenci appears to have been

Preface

one of those rare persons in whom energy and gentleness dwell together without destroying one another: her nature was simple and profound. The crimes and miseries in which she was an actor and a sufferer are as the mask and the mantle in which circumstances clothed her for her impersonation on the scene of the world.

The Cenci Palace is of great extent; and though in part modernized, there yet remains a vast and gloomy pile of feudal architecture in the same state as during the dreadful scenes which are the subject of this tragedy. The palace is situated in an obscure corner of Rome, near the quarter of the Jews, and from the upper windows you see the immense ruins of Mount Palatine half hidden under their profuse overgrowth of trees. There is a court in one part of the palace (perhaps that in which Cenci built the chapel to St. Thomas), supported by granite columns and adorned with antique friezes of fine workmanship, and built up, according to the ancient Italian fashion, with balcony over balcony of openwork. One of the gates of the palace, formed of immense stones and leading through a passage dark

Preface

and lofty and opening into gloomy subterranean chambers, struck me particularly.

Of the Castle of Petrella, I could obtain no further information than that which is to be found in the manuscript.



The Cenci
A Tragedy in Five Acts

Dramatis Personæ

COUNT FRANCESCO CENCI.

GIACOMO, }
BERNARDO, } his Sons.

CARDINAL CAMILLO.

ORSINO, a Prelate.

SAVELLA, the Pope's Legate.

OLIMPIO, }
MARZIO, } Assassins.

ANDREA, Servant to Cenci.

Nobles, Judges, Guards, Servants.

LUCRETIA, Wife of Cenci, and Stepmother of his children.

BEATRICE, his Daughter.

The SCENE lies principally in Rome, but changes during the Fourth Act to Petrella, a castle among the Apulian Apennines.

TIME : During the Pontificate of Clement VIII.



The Cenci

ACT I.

SCENE I. — *An Apartment in the Cenci Palace.*

Enter COUNT CENCI *and* CARDINAL CAMILLO.

CAMILLO



THAT matter of the murder is
hushed up
If you consent to yield his Holi-
ness

Your fief that lies beyond the Pincian gate. —
It needed all my interest in the conclave
To bend him to this point: he said that you
Bought perilous impunity with your gold;

The Cenci

That crimes like yours if once or twice compounded
Enriched the Church, and respited from hell
An erring soul which might repent and live: —
But that the glory and the interest
Of the high throne he fills, little consist
With making it a daily mart of guilt
As manifold and hideous as the deeds
Which you scarce hide from men's revolted
eyes.

CENCI

The third of my possessions — let it go!
Ay, I once heard the nephew of the Pope
Had sent his architect to view the ground,
Meaning to build a villa on my vines
The next time I compounded with his uncle:
I little thought he should outwit me so!
Henceforth no witness — not the lamp — shall
see
That which the vassal threatened to divulge
Whose throat is choked with dust for his
reward.
The deed he saw could not have rated higher

The Cenci

**Than his most worthless life : — it angers me !
Respited me from Hell ! — So may the Devil
Respite their souls from Heaven. No doubt
Pope Clement,
And his most charitable nephews, pray
That the Apostle Peter and the saints
Will grant for their sake that I long enjoy
Strength, wealth, and pride, and lust, and length
of days
Wherein to act the deeds which are the stewards
Of their revenue. — But much yet remains
To which they show no title.**

CAMILLO

**Oh, Count Cenci !
So much that thou mightst honourably live
And reconcile thyself with thine own heart
And with thy God, and with the offended world.
How hideously look deeds of lust and blood
Thro' those snow-white and venerable hairs ! —
Your children should be sitting round you now,
But that you fear to read upon their looks
The shame and misery you have written there.**

The Cenci

Where is your wife? Where is your gentle
daughter?

Methinks her sweet looks, which make all
things else

Beauteous and glad, might kill the fiend within
you.

Why is she barred from all society

But her own strange and uncomplaining
wrongs?

Talk with me, Count,—you know I mean
you well.

I stood beside your dark and fiery youth

Watching its bold and bad career, as men

Watch meteors, but it vanished not— I marked

Your desperate and remorseless manhood; now

Do I behold you in dishonoured age

Charged with a thousand unrepented crimes.

Yet I have ever hoped you would amend,

And in that hope have saved your life three
times.

CENCI

For which Aldobrandino owes you now

My fief beyond the Pincian — Cardinal,

The Cenci

One thing, I pray you, recollect henceforth,
And so we shall converse with less restraint.
A man you knew spoke of my wife and daughter —

He was accustomed to frequent my house ;
So the next day *his* wife and daughter came
And asked if I had seen him ; and I smiled :
I think they never saw him any more.

CAMILLO

Thou execrable man, beware ! —

CENCI

Of thee ?

Nay, this is idle : — We should know each other.
As to my character for what men call crime,
Seeing I please my senses as I list,
And vindicate that right with force or guile,
It is a public matter, and I care not
If I discuss it with you. I may speak
Alike to you and my own conscious heart —
For you give out that you have half reformed
me,

The Cenci

Therefore strong vanity will keep you silent
If fear should not; both will, I do not
doubt.

All men delight in sensual luxury,
All men enjoy revenge; and most exult
Over the tortures they can never feel —
Flattering their secret peace with others' pain.
But I delight in nothing else. I love
The sight of agony, and the sense of joy,
When this shall be another's, and that mine.
And I have no remorse and little fear,
Which are, I think, the checks of other men.
This mood has grown upon me, until now
Any design my captious fancy makes
The picture of its wish, and it forms none
But such as men like you would start to
know,
Is as my natural food and rest debarred
Until it be accomplished.

CAMILLO

Art thou not
Most miserable?

The Cenci

CENCI

Why, miserable? —

No. — I am what your theologians call
Hardened; — which they must be in impu-
dence,

So to revile a man's peculiar taste.

True, I was happier than I am, while yet
Manhood remained to act the thing I thought;
While lust was sweeter than revenge; and now
Invention palls: — Ay, we must all grow old —
And but that there yet remains a deed to act
Whose horror might make sharp an appetite
Duller than mine — I'd do — I know not
what.

When I was young I thought of nothing else
But pleasure; and I fed on honey sweets:
Men, by St. Thomas! cannot live like bees,
And I grew tired: — yet, till I killed a foe,
And heard his groans, and heard his children's
groans,

Knew I not what delight was else on earth,
Which now delights me little. I the rather

The Cenci

Look on such pangs as terror ill conceals,
The dry fixed eyeball ; the pale quivering lip,
Which tell me that the spirit weeps within
Tears bitterer than the bloody sweat of Christ.
I rarely kill the body, which preserves,
Like a strong prison, the soul within my power,
Wherein I feed it with the breath of fear
For hourly pain.

CAMILLO

Hell's most abandoned fiend
Did never, in the drunkenness of guilt,
Speak to his heart as now you speak to me ;
I thank my God that I believe you not.

Enter ANDREA.

ANDREA

My Lord, a gentleman from Salamanca
Would speak with you.

CENCI

Bid him attend me in the grand saloon.

[Exit ANDREA.

The Cenci

CAMILLO

Farewell ; and I will pray
Almighty God that thy false, impious words
Tempt not his spirit to abandon thee.

[*Exit* CAMILLO.]

CENCI

The third of my possessions ! I must use
Close husbandry, or gold, the old man's sword,
Falls from my withered hand. But yesterday
There came an order from the Pope to make
Fourfold provision for my cursèd sons ;
Whom I had sent from Rome to Salamanca,
Hoping some accident might cut them off ;
And meaning if I could to starve them there.
I pray thee, God, send some quick death upon
them !

Bernardo and my wife could not be worse
If dead and damned : — then, as to Beatrice —

[*Looking around him suspiciously.*

I think they cannot hear me at that door ;
What if they should ? And yet I need not
speak,

The Cenci

Though the heart triumphs with itself in words.
O, thou most silent air, that shalt not hear
What now I think! Thou, pavement, which
I tread
Towards her chamber, — let your echoes talk
Of my imperious step scorning surprise,
But not of my intent! — Andrea!

Enter ANDREA.

ANDREA

My lord?

CENCI

Bid Beatrice attend me in her chamber
This evening : — no, at midnight and alone.

[Exeunt.

SCENE II. — *A Garden of the Cenci Palace.*

Enter BEATRICE and ORSINO, as in conversation.

BEATRICE

Pervert not truth,
Orsino. You remember where we held

Beatrice and Orsino.

Beatrice : - " You are a priest ; speak not to me of love."

SCENE II

SCENE II.—*Palace.*—*Enter* KING, *alone.*

That she should not hear

That, payment, which

Myself should receive, I'll

Not give her till she

Has paid me that which she

owes me.

Exit KING.

Enter LORD

SCENE III.—*Palace.*

Enter LORD, *alone.*

My lord?

Exit LORD.

Enter LORD, *alone.*

Exit LORD.

Exit LORD.

THE END

THE END OF THE PLAY

THE END OF THE PLAY



1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes the need for transparency and accountability in financial reporting.

2. The second part of the document outlines the various methods and techniques used to collect and analyze data. It highlights the importance of using reliable sources and ensuring the accuracy of the information gathered.

3. The third part of the document discusses the challenges and limitations of data collection and analysis. It notes that while technology has advanced significantly, there are still many obstacles to overcome, such as data privacy and security concerns.

4. The fourth part of the document provides a summary of the key findings and conclusions. It reiterates the importance of continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of the data collection and analysis process.

5. The fifth part of the document discusses the implications of the findings for future research and practice. It suggests that further exploration is needed to address the remaining challenges and to develop more robust and efficient data collection and analysis methods.

6. The sixth part of the document provides a final summary and conclusion, emphasizing the need for ongoing collaboration and communication among researchers and practitioners to advance the field of data collection and analysis.





The Cenci

Nor will I leave this home of misery
Whilst my poor Bernard, and that gentle lady
To whom I owe life, and these virtuous
thoughts,

Must suffer what I still have strength to share.

Alas, Orsino! All the love that once

I felt for you is turned to bitter pain.

Ours was a youthful contract, which you first
Broke, by assuming vows no Pope will loose.

And thus I love you still, but holily,

Even as a sister or a spirit might;

And so I swear a cold fidelity.

And it is well perhaps we shall not marry.

You have a sly, equivocating vein

That suits me not. — Ah, wretched that I am!

Where shall I turn? Even now you look on
me

As you were not my friend, and as if you
Discovered that I thought so, with false smiles

Making my true suspicion seem your wrong.

Ah, no! forgive me; sorrow makes me seem

Stern than else my nature might have been;

I have a weight of melancholy thoughts,

The Cenci

And they forbode, — but what can they forbode
Worse than I now endure?

ORSINO

All will be well.
Is the petition yet prepared? You know
My zeal for all you wish, sweet Beatrice;
Doubt not but I will use my utmost skill
So that the Pope attend to your complaint.

BEATRICE

Your zeal for all I wish; — Ah, me, you are
cold!
Your utmost skill. . . speak but one word
. . . (*aside*) Alas!
Weak and deserted creature that I am,
Here I stand bickering with my only friend!
[*To ORSINO.*
This night my father gives a sumptuous feast,
Orsino; he has heard some happy news
From Salamanca, from my brothers there,
And with this outward show of love he mocks
His inward hate. 'Tis bold hypocrisy,

The Cenci

For he would gladlier celebrate their deaths,
Which I have heard him pray for on his knees :
Great God ! that such a father should be mine !
But there is mighty preparation made,
And all our kin, the Cenci, will be there,
And all the chief nobility of Rome.
And he has bidden me and my pale Mother
Attire ourselves in festival array.
Poor lady ! She expects some happy change
In his dark spirit from this act ; I none.
At supper I will give you the petition :
Till when — farewell.

ORSINO

Farewell. (*Exit* BEATRICE.) I know the Pope
Will ne'er absolve me from my priestly vow
But by absolving me from the revenue
Of many a wealthy see ; and, Beatrice,
I think to win thee at an easier rate.
Nor shall he read her eloquent petition :
He might bestow her on some poor relation
Of his sixth cousin, as he did her sister,
And I should be debarred from all access.

The Cenci

Then as to what she suffers from her father,
In all this there is much exaggeration : —
Old men are testy and will have their way ;
A man may stab his enemy, or his vassal,
And live a free life as to wine or women,
And with a peevish temper may return
To a dull home, and rate his wife and children ;
Daughters and wives call this foul tyranny.
I shall be well content if on my conscience
There rest no heavier sin than what they
suffer

From the devices of my love — A net
From which she shall escape not. Yet I
fear

Her subtle mind, her awe-inspiring gaze,
Whose beams anatomize me nerve by nerve
And lay me bare, and make me blush to see
My hidden thoughts. — Ah, no! A friendless
girl

Who clings to me, as to her only hope : —
I were a fool, not less than if a panther
Were panic-stricken by the antelope's eye,
If she escape me. [Exit.

The Cenci

SCENE III.— *A magnificent Hall in the Cenci Palace. A Banquet.*

Enter CENCI, LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, ORSINO,
CAMILLO, NOBLES.

CENCI

Welcome, my friends and kinsmen ; welcome
ye,

Princes and Cardinals, pillars of the church,
Whose presence honours our festivity.

I have too long lived like an anchorite,
And in my absence from your merry meetings
An evil word is gone abroad of me ;

But I do hope that you, my noble friends,
When you have shared the entertainment here,
And heard the pious cause for which 'tis
given,

And we have pledged a health or two together,
Will think me flesh and blood as well as
you ;

Sinful indeed, for Adam made all so,
But tender-hearted, meek, and pitiful.

The Cenci

FIRST GUEST

In truth, my Lord, you seem too light of
heart,
Too sprightly and companionable a man,
To act the deeds that rumour pins on you.
(*To his companion.*) I never saw such blithe
and open cheer
In any eye!

SECOND GUEST

Some most desired event,
In which we all demand a common joy,
Has brought us hither; let us hear it, Count.

CENCI

It is indeed a most desired event.
If, when a parent from a parent's heart
Lifts from this earth to the great father of all
A prayer, both when he lays him down to
sleep,
And when he rises up from dreaming it;
One supplication, one desire, one hope,
That he would grant a wish for his two sons,

The Cenci

Even all that he demands in their regard —
And suddenly beyond his dearest hope,
It is accomplished, he should then rejoice,
And call his friends and kinsmen to a feast,
And task their love to grace his merriment,
Then honour me thus far — for I am he.

BEATRICE (*to Lucretia*)

Great God! How horrible! Some dreadful ill
Must have befallen my brothers.

LUCRETIA

Fear not, Child,
He speaks too frankly.

BEATRICE

Ah! My blood runs cold.
I fear that wicked laughter round his eye,
Which wrinkles up the skin even to the hair.

CENCI

Here are the letters brought from Salamanca;
Beatrice, read them to your mother. God!

The Cenci

I thank thee! In one night didst thou perform,

By ways inscrutable, the thing I sought.

My disobedient and rebellious sons

Are dead! — Why dead! — What means this change of cheer?

You hear me not, I tell you they are dead;

And they will need no food or raiment more:

The tapers that did light them the dark way

Are their last cost. The Pope, I think, will not

Expect I should maintain them in their coffins.

Rejoice with me — my heart is wondrous glad.

[*LUCRETIA sinks, half-fainting; BEATRICE supports her.*

BEATRICE

It is not true! — Dear lady, pray look up.

Had it been true, there is a God in Heaven,

He would not live to boast of such a boon.

Unnatural man, thou knowest that it is false.

The Cenci

CENCI

Ay, as the word of God ; whom here I call
To witness that I speak the sober truth ;—
And whose most favouring Providence was
shown

Even in the manner of their deaths. For
Rocco

Was kneeling at the mass, with sixteen others,
When the church fell and crushed him to a
mummy,

The rest escaped unhurt. Cristofano
Was stabbed in error by a jealous man,
Whilst she he loved was sleeping with his rival
All in the selfsame hour of the same night ;
Which shows that Heaven has special care of
me.

I beg those friends who love me, that they mark
The day a feast upon their calendars.

It was the twenty-seventh of December :

Ay, read the letters if you doubt my oath.

*[The Assembly appears confused ; several
of the guests rise.]*

The Cenci

FIRST GUEST

Oh, horrible! I will depart —

SECOND GUEST

And I. —

THIRD GUEST

No, stay!

I do believe it is some jest; tho' faith!
'Tis mocking us somewhat too solemnly.
I think his son has married the Infanta,
Or found a mine of gold in El dorado;
'Tis but to season some such news; stay,
 stay!
I see 'tis only raillery by his smile.

CENCI

(Filling a bowl of wine and lifting it up.)

Oh, thou bright wine whose purple splendour
 leaps
And bubbles gaily in this golden bowl
Under the lamplight, as my spirits do,
To hear the death of my accursèd sons!

The Cenci

Could I believe thou wert their mingled blood,
Then would I taste thee like a sacrament,
And pledge with thee the mighty Devil in
Hell,
Who, if a father's curses, as men say,
Climb with swift wings after their children's
souls,
And drag them from the very throne of
Heaven,
Now triumphs in my triumph!— But thou art
Superfluous; I have drunken deep of joy,
And I will taste no other wine to-night.
Here, Andrea! Bear the bowl around.

A GUEST (*rising*)

Thou wretch!
Will none among this noble company
Check the abandoned villain?

CAMILLO

For God's sake,
Let me dismiss the guests! You are insane,
Some ill will come of this.

The Cenci

SECOND GUEST

Seize, silence him!

FIRST GUEST

I will!

THIRD GUEST

And I!

CENCI

*(Addressing those who rise with a threatening
gesture.)*

Who moves? Who speaks?

[Turning to the Company.

'Tis nothing,

Enjoy yourselves. — Beware! For my revenge

Is as the sealed commission of a king

That kills, and none dare name the murderer.

*[The Banquet is broken up; several of the
Guests are departing.*

BEATRICE

I do entreat you, go not, noble guests;

What, although tyranny and impious hate

The Cenci

Stand sheltered by a father's hoary hair?
What, if 'tis he who clothed us in these limbs
Who tortures them, and triumphs? What,
if we,
The desolate and the dead, were his own flesh,
His children and his wife, whom he is bound
To love and shelter? Shall we therefore find
No refuge in this merciless wide world?
O think what deep wrongs must have blotted
out
First love, then reverence in a child's prone
mind,
Till it thus vanquish shame and fear! O
think!
I have borne much, and kissed the sacred
hand
Which crushed us to the earth, and thought
its stroke
Was perhaps some paternal chastisement!
Have excused much, doubted; and when no
doubt
Remained, have sought by patience, love, and
tears

The Cenci

To soften him, and when this could not be
I have knelt down through the long, sleepless
nights

And lifted up to God, the father of all,
Passionate prayers: and when these were not
heard

I have still borne, — until I meet you here,
Princes and kinsmen, at this hideous feast
Given at my brothers' deaths. Two yet remain,
His wife remains and I, whom if ye save not,
Ye may soon share such merriment again
As fathers make over their children's graves.
O Prince Colonna, thou art our near kinsman,
Cardinal, thou art the Pope's chamberlain,
Camillo, thou art chief justiciary,
Take us away!

CENCI

*(He has been conversing with CAMILLO during
the first part of BEATRICE's speech; he bears
the conclusion and now advances.)*

I hope my good friends here
Will think of their own daughters — or per-
haps

The Cenci

Of their own throats — before they lend an ear
To this wild girl.

BEATRICE

(Not noticing the words of CENCI.)

Dare no one look on me?
None answer? Can one tyrant overbear
The sense of many best and wisest men?
Or is it that I sue not in some form
Of scrupulous law, that ye deny my suit?
O God! That I were buried with my brothers!
And that the flowers of this departed spring
Were fading on my grave! And that my
father
Were celebrating now one feast for all!

CAMILLO

A bitter wish for one so young and gentle;
Can we do nothing?

COLONNA

Nothing that I see.
Count Cenci were a dangerous enemy:
Yet I would second any one.

The Cenci

A CARDINAL

And I.

CENCI

Retire to your chamber, insolent girl !

BEATRICE

Retire, thou impious man ! Ay, hide thyself
Where never eye can look upon thee more !
Wouldst thou have honour and obedience
Who art a torturer ? Father, never dream
Though thou mayst overbear this company,
But ill must come of ill.—Frown not on
me !

Haste, hide thyself, lest with avenging looks
My brothers' ghosts should hunt thee from
thy seat !

Cover thy face from every living eye,
And start if thou but hear a human step :
Seek out some dark and silent corner, there
Bow thy white head before offended God,
And we will kneel around, and fervently
Pray that he pity both ourselves and thee.

The Cenci

CENCI

My friends, I do lament this insane girl
Has spoilt the mirth of our festivity.
Good night, farewell; I will not make you
longer
Spectators of our dull domestic quarrels.
Another time. —

[Exeunt all but CENCI and BEATRICE.]

My brain is swimming round;
Give me a bowl of wine! *[To BEATRICE.]*
Thou painted viper!
Beast that thou art! Fair and yet terrible!
I know a charm shall make thee meek and
tame,
Now get thee from my sight!

[Exit BEATRICE.]

Here, Andrea,
Fill up this goblet with Greek wine. I said
I would not drink this evening, but I must;
For, strange to say, I feel my spirits fail
With thinking what I have decreed to do. —

[Drinking the wine.]

The Cenci

Be thou the resolution of quick youth
Within my veins, and manhood's purpose
stern,

And age's firm, cold, subtle villainy ;
As if thou wert indeed my children's blood
Which I did thirst to drink ! The charm
works well ;

It must be done ; it shall be done, I swear !

[Exit.]

END OF THE FIRST ACT





ACT II.

SCENE I. — *An Apartment in the Cenci Palace.*

Enter LUCRETIA *and* BERNARDO.

LUCRETIA



WEEP not, my gentle boy; he
struck but me
Who have borne deeper wrongs.
In truth, if he
Had killed me, he had done a kinder deed.
O God Almighty, do thou look upon us,
We have no other friend but only thee!
Yet weep not; though I love you as my own,
I am not your true mother.

BERNARDO

O more, more,
Than ever mother was to any child,

The Cenci

That have you been to me! Had he not
been
My father, do you think that I should weep!

LUCRETIA

Alas! Poor boy, what else couldst thou have
done?

Enter BEATRICE.

BEATRICE (*in a hurried voice*)

Did he pass this way? Have you seen him,
brother?

Ah! No, that is his step upon the stairs;
'Tis nearer now; his hand is on the door;
Mother, if I to thee have ever been
A duteous child, now save me! Thou, great
God,

Whose image upon earth a father is,
Dost thou indeed abandon me? He comes:
The door is opening now; I see his face;
He frowns on others, but he smiles on me,
Even as he did after the feast last night.

The Cenci

Enter a SERVANT.

Almighty God, how merciful thou art!
'Tis but Orsino's servant. — Well, what news?

SERVANT

My master bids me say, the Holy Father
Has sent back your petition thus unopened.
[*Giving a paper.*]
And he demands at what hour 'twere secure
To visit you again?

LUCRETIA

At the Ave Mary.

[*Exit Servant.*]

So, daughter, our last hope has failed; Ah,
me!
How pale you look; you tremble, and you
stand
Wrapped in some fixed and fearful meditation,
As if one thought were over strong for you:
Your eyes have a chill glare; O, dearest child!
Are you gone mad? If not, pray speak to me.

The Cenci

BEATRICE

You see I am not mad : I speak to you.

LUCRETIA

You talked of something that your father did
After that dreadful feast? Could it be worse
Than when he smiled, and cried, My sons are
dead!

And every one looked in his neighbour's face
To see if others were as white as he?
At the first word he spoke I felt the blood
Rush to my heart, and fell into a trance ;
And when it past I sat all weak and wild ;
Whilst you alone stood up, and with strong
words
Checked his unnatural pride ; and I could
see

The devil was rebuked that lives in him.
Until this hour thus have you ever stood
Between us and your father's moody wrath
Like a protecting presence : your firm mind
Has been our only refuge and defence :

THE JURY

What can you say for me? What can
you

say for me that has the necessary look,
indicating it was intended for?

BERNARDO

What is it that you say? I was just think-
ing

There never was a struggle any more.

Just like my father, have been Jack and
Bernardo.

Yes never — In Justice worse cases of it
There was it is. I think it that at last.

ANGELINA

Oh don't say just that. Tell me at once

What did your father do or say to you?

He never did that that accused first

One moment in your chamber. — Speak to
me.

BERNARDO

O sister, sister, please, speak to us!

The Cenci

BEATRICE

(Speaking very slowly with a forced calmness.)

It was one word, Mother, one little word ;
One look, one smile. *(Wildly.)* Oh! He
has trampled me
Under his feet, and made the blood stream
down

My pallid cheeks. And he has given us all
Ditch water, and the fever-stricken flesh
Of buffaloes, and bade us eat or starve,
And we have eaten. — He has made me look
On my beloved Bernardo, when the rust
Of heavy chains has gangrened his sweet limbs,
And I have never yet despaired — but now !
What could I say ? *[Recovering herself.*

Ah ! No, 'tis nothing new.

The sufferings we all share have made me wild :
He only struck and cursed me as he passed ;
He said, he looked, he did ; — nothing at all
Beyond his wont, yet it disordered me.
Alas ! I am forgetful of my duty,
I should preserve my senses for your sake.

The Cenci

LUCRETIA

Nay, Beatrice ; have courage, my sweet girl,
If any one despairs it should be I
Who loved him once, and now must live with
him
Till God in pity call for him or me.
For you may, like your sister, find some hus-
band,
And smile, years hence, with children round
your knees ;
Whilst I, then dead, and all this hideous coil
Shall be remembered only as a dream.

BEATRICE

Talk not to me, dear lady, of a husband.
Did you not nurse me when my mother died ?
Did you not shield me and that dearest boy ?
And had we any other friend but you
In infancy, with gentle words and looks,
To win our father not to murder us ?
And shall I now desert you ? May the ghost
Of my dead Mother plead against my soul

The Cenci

If I abandon her who filled the place
She left, with more, even, than a mother's love !

BERNARDO

And I am of my sister's mind. Indeed
I would not leave you in this wretchedness,
Even though the Pope should make me free
to live
In some blithe place, like others of my age,
With sports, and delicate food, and the fresh
air.
O never think that I will leave you, Mother !

LUCRETIA

My dear, dear children !

Enter CENCI, suddenly.

CENCI

What, Beatrice here !
Come hither !
[She sbrinks back and covers her face.
Nay, hide not your face, 'tis fair ;

THE LAST

When I was young, I thought you loved me
And

When I was young, I thought you loved me,

Thinking I was not as thinking now

As when I thought you loved me
And

When I was young, I thought you loved me—
And I will.

THE LAST

When I was young, I thought you loved me.

I thought the world would love me, O
And

THE LAST

When I was young, I thought you loved me

And from my lips, and you were thinking
And

And from your presence, as you saw from
mine.

So, I command you—From this day and
hour

Never again, I think, with fearless eye,
And brow superior, and unshaken cheek,

The Cenci

And that lip made for tenderness or scorn,
Shalt thou strike dumb the meanest of man-
kind;

Me least of all. Now get thee to thy cham-
ber!

Thou too, loathed image of thy cursèd mother,
[*To* BERNARDO.

Thy milky, meek face makes me sick with
hate!

[*Exeunt* BEATRICE and BERNARDO.

(*Aside.*) So much has past between us as must
make

Me bold, her fearful. — 'Tis an awful thing
To touch such mischief as I now conceive:
So men sit shivering on the dewy bank,
And try the chill stream with their feet; once
in . . .

How the delighted spirit pants for joy!

LUCRETIA

(*Advancing timidly toward him.*)

O husband! Pray forgive poor Beatrice.
She meant not any ill.

The Cenci

CENCI

Nor you perhaps?
Nor that young imp, whom you have taught
by rote
Parricide with his alphabet? Nor Giacomo?
Nor those two most unnatural sons, who
stirred
Enmity up against me with the Pope?
Whom in one night merciful God cut off:
Innocent lambs! They thought not any ill.
You were not here conspiring? You said
nothing
Of how I might be dungeoned as a madman;
Or be condemned to death for some offence,
And you would be the witnesses? — This fail-
ing,
How just it were to hire assassins, or
Put sudden poison in my evening drink?
Or smother me when overcome by wine?
Seeing we had no other judge but God,
And he had sentenced me, and there were none
But you to be the executioners

The Cenci

Of his decree enregistered in heaven?
Oh, no! You said not this?

LUCRETIA

So help me God,
I never thought the things you charge me
with!

CENCI

If you dare speak that wicked lie again
I'll kill you. What! It was not by your
counsel
That Beatrice disturbed the feast last night?
You did not hope to stir some enemies
Against me, and escape, and laugh to scorn
What every nerve of you now trembles at?
You judged that men were bolder than they
are;
Few dare to stand between their grave and me.

LUCRETIA

Look not so dreadfully! By my salvation,
I knew not aught that Beatrice designed;

The Cenci

Nor do I think she designed anything
Until she heard you talk of her dead brothers.

CENCI

Blaspheming liar! You are damned for this!
But I will take you where you may persuade
The stones you tread on to deliver you:
For men shall there be none but those who
dare

All things — not question that which I com-
mand.

On Wednesday next I shall set out: you know
That savage rock, the Castle of Petrella:
'Tis safely walled, and moated round about:
Its dungeons underground and its thick towers
Never told tales; though they have heard and
seen

What might make dumb things speak. — Why
do you linger?

Make speediest preparation for the journey!

[*Exit* LUCRETIA.]

The all-beholding sun yet shines; I hear
A busy stir of men about the streets;

The Cenci

I see the bright sky through the window-
panes :

It is a garish, broad, and peering day ;
Loud, light, suspicious, full of eyes and ears,
And every little corner, nook, and hole
Is penetrated with the insolent light.
Come darkness ! Yet, what is the day to me ?
And wherefore should I wish for night, who do
A deed which shall confound both night and
day ?

'Tis she shall grope through a bewildering
mist

Of horror : if there be a sun in heaven
She shall not dare to look upon its beams ;
Nor feel its warmth. Let her then wish for
night ;

The act I think shall soon extinguish all
For me : I bear a darker, deadlier gloom
Than the earth's shade, or interlunar air,
Or constellations quenched in murkiest cloud,
In which I walk secure and unbeheld
Towards my purpose. — Would that it were
done !

[*Exit.*

The Cenci

SCENE II. — *A Chamber in the Vatican.*

Enter CAMILLO and GIACOMO, in conversation.

CAMILLO

There is an obsolete and doubtful law
By which you might obtain a bare provision
Of food and clothing —

GIACOMO

Nothing more? Alas!
Bare must be the provision which strict law
Awards, and agèd, sullen avarice pays.
Why did my father not apprentice me
To some mechanic trade? I should have
then
Been trained in no high-born necessities
Which I could meet not by my daily toil.
The eldest son of a rich nobleman
Is heir to all his incapacities;
He has wide wants, and narrow powers. If
you,
Cardinal Camillo, were reduced at once

The Cenci

From thrice-driven beds of down, and delicate
food,
An hundred servants, and six palaces,
To that which nature doth indeed require? —

CAMILLO

Nay, there is reason in your plea; 'twere hard.

GIACOMO

'Tis hard for a firm man to bear : but I
Have a dear wife, a lady of high birth,
Whose dowry in ill hour I lent my father
Without a bond or witness to the deed :
And children, who inherit her fine senses,
The fairest creatures in this breathing world ;
And she and they reproach me not. Cardinal,
Do you not think the Pope would interpose
And stretch authority beyond the law ?

CAMILLO

Though your peculiar case is hard, I know
The Pope will not divert the course of law.
After that impious feast the other night

The Cenci

I spoke with him, and urged him then to
check

Your father's cruel hand ; he frowned and said,
" Children are disobedient, and they sting
Their fathers' hearts to madness and despair,
Requiting years of care with contumely.
I pity the Count Cenci from my heart ;
His outraged love perhaps awakened hate,
And thus he is exasperated to ill.

In the great war between the old and young
I, who have white hairs and a tottering body,
Will keep at least blameless neutrality."

Enter ORSINO.

You, my good Lord Orsino, heard those
words.

ORSINO

What words ?

GIACOMO

Alas, repeat them not again !
There then is no redress for me, at least
None but that which I may achieve myself,
Since I am driven to the brink. — But, say,

The Cenci

My innocent sister and my only brother
Are dying underneath my father's eye.
The memorable torturers of this land,
Gleaz Visconti, Borgia, Ezzelin,
Never inflicted on the meanest slave
What these endure ; shall they have no protection ?

CAMILLO

Why, if they would petition to the Pope
I see not how he could refuse it — yet
He holds it of most dangerous example
In aught to weaken the paternal power,
Being, as 'twere, the shadow of his own.
I pray you now excuse me. I have business
That will not bear delay.

[*Exit* CAMILLO.]

GIACOMO

But you, Orsino,
Have the petition : wherefore not present it ?

ORSINO

I have presented it, and backed it with
My earnest prayers, and urgent interest ;

The Cenci

It was returned unanswered. I doubt not
But that the strange and execrable deeds
Alleged in it — in truth they might well baffle
Any belief — have turned the Pope's dis-
pleasure
Upon the accusers from the criminal :
So I should guess from what Camillo said.

GIACOMO

My friend, that palace-walking devil Gold
Has whispered silence to his Holiness :
And we are left, as scorpions ringed with fire.
What should we do but strike ourselves to
death ?
For he who is our murderous persecutor
Is shielded by a father's holy name,
Or I would — *[Stops abruptly.]*

ORSINO

What? Fear not to speak your thought.
Words are but holy as the deeds they cover :
A priest who has forsworn the God he serves ;
A judge who makes Truth weep at his decree ;
A friend who should weave counsel, as I now,

The Cenci

But as the mantle of some selfish guile ;
A father who is all a tyrant seems,
Were the profaner for his sacred name.

GIACOMO

Ask me not what I think ; the unwilling brain
Feigns often what it would not ; and we trust
Imagination with such phantasies
As the tongue dares not fashion into words,
Which have no words, their horror makes them
dim
To the mind's eye. — My heart denies itself
To think what you demand.

ORSINO

But a friend's bosom
Is as the inmost cave of our own mind
Where we sit shut from the wide gaze of day,
And from the all-communicating air.
You look what I suspected —

GIACOMO

Spare me now !
I am as one lost in a midnight wood,

The Cenci

Who dares not ask some harmless passenger
The path across the wilderness, lest he,
As my thoughts are, should be — a murderer.
I know you are my friend, and all I dare
Speak to my soul that will I trust with thee.
But now my heart is heavy, and would take
Lone counsel from a night of sleepless care.
Pardon me, that I say farewell — farewell!
I would that to my own suspected self
I could address a word so full of peace.

ORSINO

Farewell! — Be your thoughts better or more
bold. [Exit GIACOMO.]
I had disposed the Cardinal Camillo
To feed his hope with cold encouragement:
It fortunately serves my close designs
That 'tis a trick of this same family
To analyze their own and other minds.
Such self-anatomy shall teach the will
Dangerous secrets: for it tempts our powers,
Knowing what must be thought, and may be
done,

The Cenci

Into the depth of darkest purposes :
So Cenci fell into the pit ; even I,
Since Beatrice unveiled me to myself,
And made me shrink from what I cannot shun,
Show a poor figure to my own esteem,
To which I grow half-reconciled. I'll do
As little mischief as I can ; that thought
Shall fee the accuser conscience.

[After a pause.

Now what harm
If Cenci should be murdered ? — Yet, if murdered,
Wherefore by me ? And what if I could take
The profit, yet omit the sin and peril
In such an action ? Of all earthly things
I fear a man whose blows outspeed his words ;
And such is Cenci : and while Cenci lives
His daughter's dowry were a secret grave
If a priest wins her. — Oh, fair Beatrice !
Would that I loved thee not, or loving thee
Could but despise danger and gold and all
That frowns between my wish and its effect,
Or smiles beyond it ! There is no escape . . .

The Cenci

Her bright form kneels beside me at the altar,
And follows me to the resort of men,
And fills my slumber with tumultuous dreams,
So when I wake my blood seems liquid fire ;
And if I strike my damp and dizzy head
My hot palm scorches it : her very name,
But spoken by a stranger, makes my heart
Sicken and pant ; and thus unprofitably
I clasp the phantom of unfelt delights
Till weak imagination half possesses
The self-created shadow. Yet much longer
Will I not nurse this life of feverous hours :
From the unravelled hopes of Giacomo
I must work out my own dear purposes.
I see, as from a tower, the end of all :
Her father dead ; her brother bound to me
By a dark secret, surer than the grave ;
Her mother scared and unexpostulating
From the dread manner of her wish achieved :
And she ! — Once more take courage, my faint
heart ;
What dares a friendless maiden matched with
thee ?

The Cenci

I have such foresight as assures success :
Some unbeheld divinity doth ever,
When dread events are near, stir up men's
minds

To black suggestions ; and he prospers best,
Not who becomes the instrument of ill,
But who can flatter the dark spirit, that makes
Its empire and its prey of other hearts
Till it become his slave . . . as I will do.

[*Exit.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT





ACT III.

SCENE I. — *An Apartment in the Conci Palace.*

LUCRETIA, *in her own* BEATRICE.

BEATRICE

(She enters staggering, and speaks wildly.)



TEACH me that handkerchief! —

My brain is hurt;

My eyes are full of blood; just
wipe them for me . . .

I see but indistinctly . . .

LUCRETIA

My sweet child,
You have no wound; 'tis only a cold dew
That starts from your dear brow . . . Alas!
Alas!
What has befallen?

The Cenci

BEATRICE

How comes this hair undone?
Its wandering strings must be what blind me
so,
And yet I tied it fast. — O, horrible!
The pavement sinks under my feet! The
walls
Spin round! I see a woman weeping there,
And standing calm and motionless, whilst I
Slide giddily as the world reels. . . . My
God!
The beautiful blue heaven is flecked with
blood!
The sunshine on the floor is black! The air
Is changed to vapours such as the dead breathe
In charnel pits! Pah! I am choked! There
creeps
A clinging, black, contaminating mist
About me . . . 'tis substantial, heavy, thick,
I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues
My fingers and my limbs to one another,
And eats into my sinews, and dissolves

The Cenci

My flesh to a pollution, poisoning
The subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life !
My God ! I never knew what the mad felt
Before ; for I am mad beyond all doubt !
(*More wildly*) No, I am dead ! These putre-
fying limbs
Shut round and sepulchre the panting soul
Which would burst forth into the wandering
air ! [*A pause.*
What hideous thought was that I had even
now ?
'Tis gone ; and yet its burthen remains here
O'er these dull eyes . . . upon this weary
heart !
O world ! O life ! O day ! O misery !

LUCRETIA

What ails thee, my poor child ? She answers
not :
Her spirit apprehends the sense of pain,
But not its cause ; suffering has dried away
The source from which it sprung . . .

The Cenci

BEATRICE (*frantically*)

Like Parricide . . .
Misery has killed its father : yet its father
Never like mine . . . O God ! What thing
am I ?

LUCRETIA

My dearest child, what has your father done ?

BEATRICE (*doubtfully*)

Who art thou, questioner ? I have no father.
(*Aside*) She is the madhouse nurse who tends
on me,

It is a piteous office.

(*To LUCRETIA, in a slow, subdued voice.*)

Do you know
I thought I was that wretched Beatrice
Men speak of, whom her father sometimes
hales
From hall to hall by the entangled hair ;
At others, pens up naked in damp cells
Where scaly reptiles crawl, and starves her
there,

The Cenci

Till she will eat strange flesh. This woful
story

So did I overact in my sick dreams,
That I imagined . . . no, it cannot be!
Horrible things have been in this wild world,
Prodigious mixtures, and confusions strange
Of good and ill; and worse have been con-
ceived

Than ever there was found a heart to do.
But never fancy imaged such a deed
As . . . [*Pauses, suddenly recollecting herself.*

Who art thou? Swear to me, ere I die
With fearful expectation, that indeed
Thou art not what thou seemest . . . Mother!

LUCRETIA

Oh!

My sweet child, know you . . .

BEATRICE

Yet speak it not:
For then if this be truth, that other too
Must be a truth, a firm enduring truth,
Linked with each lasting circumstance of life,

The Cenci

Never to change, never to pass away.
Why, so it is. This is the Cenci Palace;
Thou art Lucretia; I am Beatrice.
I have talked some wild words, but will no
more.
Mother, come near me: from this point of
time,
I am . . . [*Her voice dies away faintly.*]

LUCRETIA

Alas! What has befallen thee, child?
What has thy father done?

BEATRICE

What have I done?
Am I not innocent? Is it my crime
That one with white hair and imperious brow,
Who tortured me from my forgotten years
As parents only dare, should call himself
My father, yet should be! — Oh, what am I?
What name, what place, what memory shall be
mine?
What retrospects, outliving even despair?

The Cenci

Of that which has transformed me : I, whose
thought
Is like a ghost shrouded and folded up
In its own formless horror : of all words,
That minister to mortal intercourse,
Which wouldst thou hear? For there is none
to tell
My misery : if another ever knew
Aught like to it, she died as I will die,
And left it, as I must, without a name.
Death ! Death ! Our law and our religion call
thee
A punishment and a reward . . . Oh, which
Have I deserved?

LUCRETIA

The peace of innocence ;
Till in your season you be called to heaven.
Whate'er you may have suffered, you have
done
No evil. Death must be the punishment
Of crime, or the reward of trampling down

The Cenci

The thorns which God has strewed upon the
path
Which leads to immortality.

BEATRICE

Ay, death . . .

The punishment of crime. I pray thee, God,
Let me not be bewildered while I judge.
If I must live day after day, and keep
These limbs, the unworthy temple of thy
spirit,
As a foul den from which what thou abhorrest
May mock thee, unavenged . . . it shall not
be!
Self-murder . . . no, that might be no escape,
For thy decree yawns like a Hell between
Our will and it: — O! In this mortal world
There is no vindication and no law
Which can adjudge and execute the doom
Of that through which I suffer.

Enter ORSINO.

(She approaches him solemnly.) Welcome,
Friend!

The Cenci

I have to tell you that, since last we met,
I have endured a wrong so great and strange,
That neither life nor death can give me rest.
Ask me not what it is, for there are deeds
Which have no form, sufferings which have no
tongue.

ORSINO

And what is he who has thus injured you ?

BEATRICE

The man they call my father : a dread name.

ORSINO

It cannot be . . .

BEATRICE

What it can be, or not,
Forbear to think. It is, and it has been ;
Advise me how it shall not be again.
I thought to die ; but a religious awe
Restrains me, and the dread lest death itself
Might be no refuge from the consciousness
Of what is yet unexpiated. Oh, speak !

The Cenci

ORSINO

Accuse him of the deed, and let the law
Avenge thee.

BEATRICE

Oh, ice-hearted counsellor!
If I could find a word that might make known
The crime of my destroyer; and that done,
My tongue should like a knife tear out the
secret
Which cankers my heart's core; ay, lay all
bare
So that my unpolluted fame should be
With vilest gossips a stale mouthèd story;
A mock, a byword, an astonishment:—
If this were done, which never shall be done,
Think of the offender's gold, his dreaded hate,
And the strange horror of the accuser's tale,
Baffling belief, and overpowering speech;
Scarce whispered, unimaginable, wrapt
In hideous hints . . . Oh, most assured re-
dress!

The Cenci

ORSINO

You will endure it then ?

BEATRICE

Endure ? — Orsino,
It seems your counsel is small profit.

[Turns from him, and speaks half to herself.

Ay,

All must be suddenly resolved and done.
What is this undistinguishable mist
Of thoughts, which rise, like shadow after
shadow,
Darkening each other ?

ORSINO

Should the offender live ?
Triumph in his misdeed ? and make, by use,
His crime, whate'er it is, dreadful no doubt,
Thine element ; until thou mayest become
Utterly lost ; subdued even to the hue
Of that which thou permittest ?

The Cenci

BEATRICE (*to herself*)

Mighty death !
Thou double-visaged shadow? Only judge !
Rightfullest arbiter !

[She retires absorbed in thought.]

LUCRETIA

If the lightning
Of God has e'er descended to avenge . . .

ORSINO

Blaspheme not ! His high Providence commits
Its glory on this earth, and their own wrongs
Into the hands of men ; if they neglect
To punish crime . . .

LUCRETIA

But if one, like this wretch,
Should mock, with gold, opinion, law, and
power?
If there be no appeal to that which makes
The guiltiest tremble? If because our wrongs,

The Cenci

For that they are unnatural, strange, and monstrous,

Exceed all measure of belief? O God!

If, for the very reasons which should make
Redress most swift and sure, our injurer
triumphs?

And we, the victims, bear worse punishment
Than that appointed for their torturer?

ORSINO

Think not

But that there is redress where there is wrong,
So we are bold enough to seize it.

LUCRETIA

How?

If there were any way to make all sure,
I know not . . . but I think it might be
good
To . . .

ORSINO

Why, his late outrage to Beatrice;
For it is such, as I but faintly guess,

The Cenci

As makes remorse dishonour, and leaves her
Only one duty, how she may avenge :
You, but one refuge from ills ill endured ;
Me, but one counsel . . .

LUCRETIA

For we cannot hope
That aid, or retribution, or resource
Will arise thence, where every other one
Might find them with less need.

[BEATRICE *advances.*

ORSINO

Then . . .

BEATRICE

Peace, Orsino !
And, honoured Lady, while I speak, I pray
That you put off, as garments overworn,
Forbearance and respect, remorse and fear,
And all the fit restraints of daily life,
Which have been borne from childhood, but
which now

The Cenci

Would be a mockery to my holier plea.
As I have said, I have endured a wrong,
Which, though it be expressionless, is such
As asks atonement; both for what is past,
And lest I be reserved, day after day,
To load with crimes an overburthened soul,
And be . . . what ye can dream not. I have
prayed
To God, and I have talked with my own heart,
And have unravelled my entangled will,
And have at length determined what is right.
Art thou my friend, Orsino? False or true?
Pledge thy salvation ere I speak.

ORSINO

I swear
To dedicate my cunning, and my strength,
My silence, and whatever else is mine,
To thy commands.

LUCRETIA

You think we should devise
His death?

The Cenci

BEATRICE

And execute what is devised,
And suddenly. We must be brief and bold.

ORSINO

And yet most cautious.

LUCRETIA

For the jealous laws
Would punish us with death and infamy
For that which it became themselves to do.

BEATRICE

Be cautious as ye may, but prompt. Orsino,
What are the means?

ORSINO

I know two dull, fierce outlaws,
Who think man's spirit as a worm's, and they
Would trample out, for any slight caprice,
The meanest or the noblest life. This mood
Is marketable here in Rome. They sell
What we now want.

The Cenci

LUCRETIA

To-morrow before dawn,
Cenci will take us to that lonely rock,
Petrella, in the Apulian Apennines.
If he arrive there . . .

BEATRICE

He must not arrive.

ORSINO

Will it be dark before you reach the tower?

LUCRETIA

The sun will scarce be set.

BEATRICE

But I remember
Two miles on this side of the fort, the road
Crosses a deep ravine ; 'tis rough and narrow,
And winds with short turns down the precipice ;
And in its depth there is a mighty rock,

The Cenci

Which has, from unimaginable years,
Sustained itself with terror and with toil
Over a gulph, and with the agony
With which it clings seems slowly coming
down ;

Even as a wretched soul hour after hour,
Clings to the mass of life ; yet clinging,
leans ;

And leaning, makes more dark the dread
abyss

In which it fears to fall : beneath this crag
Huge as despair, as if in weariness,
The melancholy mountain yawns . . . below,
You hear but see not an impetuous torrent
Raging among the caverns, and a bridge
Crosses the chasm ; and high above there
grow,

With intersecting trunks, from crag to crag,
Cedars, and yews, and pines ; whose tangled
hair

Is matted in one solid roof of shade
By the dark ivy's twine. At noonday here
'Tis twilight, and at sunset blackest night.

The Cenci

ORSINO

Before you reach that bridge make some excuse
For spurring on your mules, or loitering
Until . . .

BEATRICE

What sound is that?

LUCRETIA

Hark! No, it cannot be a servant's step;
It must be Cenci, unexpectedly
Returned . . . Make some excuse for being
here.

BEATRICE

(To ORSINO, as she goes out.)

That step we hear approach must never pass
The bridge of which we spoke.

[Exeunt LUCRETIA and BEATRICE.]

ORSINO

What shall I do?
Cenci must find me here, and I must bear

The Cenci

The imperious inquisition of his looks
As to what brought me hither : let me mask
Mine own in some inane and vacant smile.

Enter GIACOMO, in a hurried manner.

How! Have you ventured hither? Know you
then
That Cenci is from home?

GIACOMO

I sought him here ;
And now must wait till he returns.

ORSINO

Great God !
Weigh you the danger of this rashness ?

GIACOMO

Ay!
Does my destroyer know his danger? We
Are now no more, as once, parent and child,
But man to man ; the oppressor to the op-
pressed ;
The slanderer to the slandered ; foe to foe :

The Cenci

He has cast Nature off, which was his shield,
And Nature casts him off, who is her shame ;
And I spurn both. Is it a father's throat
Which I will shake, and say, I ask not gold ;
I ask not happy years ; nor memories
Of tranquil childhood ; nor home-sheltered
love ;
Though all these hast thou torn from me, and
more ;
But only my fair fame ; only one hoard
Of peace, which I thought hidden from thy
hate,
Under the penury heaped on me by thee,
Or I will . . . God can understand and par-
don,
Why should I speak with man ?

ORSINO

Be calm, dear friend.

GIACOMO

Well, I will calmly tell you what he did.
This old Francesco Cenci, as you know,

The Cenci

Borrowed the dowry of my wife from me,
And then denied the loan ; and left me so
In poverty, the which I sought to mend
By holding a poor office in the state.
It had been promised to me, and already
I bought new clothing for my ragged babes,
And my wife smiled ; and my heart knew
repose.

When Cenci's intercession, as I found,
Conferred this office on a wretch, whom thus
He paid for vilest service. I returned
With this ill news, and we sate sad together,
Solacing our despondency with tears
Of such affection and unbroken faith
As temper life's worst bitterness ; when he,
As he is wont, came to upbraid and curse,
Mocking our poverty, and telling us
Such was God's scourge for disobedient sons.
And then, that I might strike him dumb with
shame,

I spoke of my wife's dowry ; but he coined
A brief yet specious tale, how I had wasted
The sum in secret riot ; and he saw

The Cenci

My wife was touched, and he went smiling
forth.

And when I knew the impression he had
made,

And felt my wife insult with silent scorn
My ardent truth, and look averse and cold,
I went forth too : but soon returned again ;
Yet not so soon but that my wife had taught
My children her harsh thoughts, and they all
cried,

“ Give us clothes, father ! Give us better food !
What you in one night squander were enough
For months ! ” I looked, and saw that home
was hell.

And to that hell will I return no more
Until mine enemy has rendered up
Atonement, or, as he gave life to me
I will, reversing nature's law . . .

ORSINO

Trust me,
The compensation which thou seekest here
Will be denied.

The Cenci

GIACOMO

Then . . . Are you not my friend?
Did you not hint at the alternative,
Upon the brink of which you see I stand,
The other day when we conversed together?
My wrongs were then less. That word parricide,
Although I am resolved, haunts me like fear.

ORSINO

It must be fear itself, for the bare word
Is hollow mockery. Mark, how wisest God
Draws to one point the threads of a just doom,
So sanctifying it: what you devise
Is, as it were, accomplished.

GIACOMO

Is he dead?

ORSINO

His grave is ready. Know that since we met
Cenci has done an outrage to his daughter.

The Cenci

GIACOMO

What outrage?

ORSINO

That she speaks not, but you may
Conceive such half-conjectures as I do,
From her fixed paleness, and the lofty grief
Of her stern brow bent on the idle air,
And her severe unmodulated voice,
Drowning both tenderness and dread; and last
From this; that whilst her stepmother and I,
Bewildered in our horror, talked together
With obscure hints; both self-misunderstood
And darkly guessing, stumbling, in our talk,
Over the truth, and yet to its revenge,
She interrupted us, and with a look
Which told before she spoke it, he must die : . . .

GIACOMO

It is enough. My doubts are well appeased;
There is a higher reason for the act
Than mine; there is a holier judge than me,
A more unblamed avenger. Beatrice,

The Cenci

Who in the gentleness of thy sweet youth
Hast never trodden on a worm, or bruised
A living flower, but thou hast pitied it
With needless tears! Fair sister, thou in
whom

Men wondered how such loveliness and wisdom
Did not destroy each other! Is there made
Ravage of thee? O heart, I ask no more
Justification! Shall I wait, Orsino,
Till he return, and stab him at the door?

ORSINO

Not so; some accident might interpose
To rescue him from what is now most sure;
And you are unprovided where to fly,
How to excuse or to conceal. Nay, listen:
All is contrived; success is so assured
That . . .

Enter BEATRICE.

BEATRICE

'Tis my brother's voice! You know me not?

The Cenci

GIACOMO

My sister, my lost sister!

BEATRICE

Lost indeed!

I see Orsino has talked with you, and
That you conjecture things too horrible
To speak, yet far less than the truth. Now,
stay not,

He might return: yet kiss me; I shall know
That then thou hast consented to his death.
Farewell, farewell! Let piety to God,
Brotherly love, justice and clemency,
And all things that make tender hardest hearts
Make thine hard, brother. Answer not . . .
farewell. *[Exeunt severally.]*

SCENE II. — *A mean Apartment in Giacomo's House.* GIACOMO alone.

GIACOMO

'Tis midnight, and Orsino comes not yet.
[Thunder, and the sound of a storm.]

The Cenci

What! can the everlasting elements
Feel with a worm like man? If so the shaft
Of mercy-wingèd lightning would not fall
On stones and trees. My wife and children
sleep :

They are now living in unmeaning dreams :
But I must wake, still doubting if that deed
Be just which was most necessary. O,
Thou un replenished lamp! whose narrow fire
Is shaken by the wind, and on whose edge
Devouring darkness hovers! Thou small
flame,

Which, as a dying pulse rises and falls,
Still flickerest up and down, how very soon,
Did I not feed thee, wouldst thou fail and be
As thou hadst never been! So wastes and
sinks

Even now, perhaps, the life that kindled mine :
But that no power can fill with vital oil
That broken lamp of flesh. Ha! 'tis the
blood

Which fed these veins that ebbs till all is cold :
It is the form that moulded mine that sinks

The Cenci

ORSINO

And safe
Within Petrella. He past by the spot
Appointed for the deed an hour too soon.

GIACOMO

Are we the fools of such contingencies?
And do we waste in blind misgivings thus
The hours when we should act? Then wind
and thunder,
Which seemed to howl his knell, is the loud
laughter
With which Heaven mocks our weakness! I
henceforth
Will ne'er repent of aught designed or done
But my repentance.

ORSINO

See, the lamp is out

GIACOMO

If no remorse is ours when the dim air
Has drank this innocent flame, why should we
quail

The Cenci

When Cenci's life, that light by which ill
spirits
See the worst deeds they prompt, shall sink
for ever?
No, I am hardened.

ORSINO

Why, what need of this?
Who feared the pale intrusion of remorse
In a just deed? Altho' our first plan failed,
Doubt not but he will soon be laid to rest.
But light the lamp; let us not talk i' the dark.

GIACOMO (*lighting the lamp*)

And yet once quenched I cannot thus relume
My father's life: do you not think his ghost
Might plead that argument with God?

ORSINO

Once gone,
You cannot now recall your sister's peace;
Your own extinguished years of youth and
hope;

The Cenci

Nor your wife's bitter words; nor all the
taunts
Which, from the prosperous, weak misfortune
takes;
Nor your dead mother; nor . . .

GIACOMO

O, speak no more!
I am resolved, although this very hand
Must quench the life that animated it.

ORSINO

There is no need of that. Listen: you know
Olimpio, the castellan of Petrella
In old Colonna's time; him whom your father
Degraded from his post? And Marzio,
That desperate wretch, whom he deprived last
year
Of a reward of blood, well earned and due?

GIACOMO

I knew Olimpio; and they say he hated
Old Cenci so, that in his silent rage

The Cenci

His lips grew white only to see him pass.
Of Marzio I know nothing.

ORSINO

Marzio's hate
Matches Olimpio's. I have sent these men,
But in your name, and as at your request,
To talk with Beatrice and Lucretia.

GIACOMO

Only to talk?

ORSINO

The moments which even now
Pass onward to to-morrow's midnight hour
May memorize their flight with death: ere
then
They must have talked, and may perhaps have
done,
And made an end . . .

GIACOMO

Listen! What sound is that?

The Cenci

ORSINO

The house-dog moans, and the beams crack :
nought else.

GIACOMO

It is my wife complaining in her sleep :
I doubt not she is saying bitter things
Of me ; and all my children round her dream-
ing
That I deny them sustenance.

ORSINO

Whilst he
Who truly took it from them, and who fills
Their hungry rest with bitterness, now sleeps
Lapped in bad pleasures, and triumphantly
Mocks thee in visions of successful hate
Too like the truth of day.

GIACOMO

If e'er he wakes
Again, I will not trust to hireling hands . . .

The Cenci

ORSINO

Why, that were well. I must be gone ; good
night :

When next we meet — may all be done !

GIACOMO

And all
Forgotten : Oh, that I had never been !

[Exeunt.]

END OF THE THIRD ACT





ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*An Apartment in the Castle of
Petrella.*

Enter CENCI.

CENCI



HE comes not; yet I left her even
now

Vanquished and faint. She knows
the penalty

Of her delay: yet what if threats are vain?
Am I not now within Petrella's moat?
Or fear I still the eyes and ears of Rome?
Might I not drag her by the golden hair?
Stamp on her? Keep her sleepless till her
brain

The Cenci

Be overworn? Tame her with chains and
famine?

Less would suffice. Yet so to leave undone
What I most seek! No, 'tis her stubborn will
Which by its own consent shall stoop as low
As that which drags it down.

Enter LUCRETIA.

Thou loathèd wretch!
Hide thee from my abhorrence; fly, begone!
Yet stay! Bid Beatrice come hither.

LUCRETIA

Oh,
Husband! I pray for thine own wretched sake
Heed what thou dost. A man who walks like
thee
Thro' crimes, and thro' the danger of his
crimes,
Each hour may stumble o'er a sudden grave.
And thou art old; thy hairs are hoary gray;
As thou wouldst save thyself from death and
hell,

The Cenci

Pity thy daughter ; give her to some friend
In marriage : so that she may tempt thee not
To hatred, or worse thoughts, if worse there
be.

CENCI

What! like her sister who has found a home
To mock my hate from with prosperity?
Strange ruin shall destroy both her and thee
And all that yet remain. My death may be
Rapid, her destiny outspeeds it. Go,
Bid her come hither, and before my mood
Be changed, lest I should drag her by the hair.

LUCRETIA

She sent me to thee, husband. At thy presence
She fell, as thou dost know, into a trance ;
And in that trance she heard a voice which
said,

“Cenci must die! Let him confess himself!
Even now the accusing Angel waits to hear
If God, to punish his enormous crimes,
Harden his dying heart!”

The Cenci

CENCI

Why — such things are . . .
No doubt divine revealings may be made.
'Tis plain I have been favoured from above,
For when I cursed my sons they died. — Ay
 . . . so . . .
As to the right or wrong that's talk . . .
 repentance . . .
Repentance is an easy moment's work
And more depends on God than me. Well
 . . . well . . .
I must give up the greater point, which was
To poison and corrupt her soul.

*[A pause. LUCRETIA approaches anxiously,
and then shrinks back as he speaks.]*

One, two ;

Ay . . . Rocco and Cristofano my curse
Strangled : and Giacomo, I think, will find
Life a worse Hell than that beyond the grave :
Beatrice shall, if there be skill in hate,
Die in despair, blaspheming : to Bernardo,
He is so innocent, I will bequeath

The Cenci

The memory of these deeds, and make his
youth

The sepulchre of hope, where evil thoughts
Shall grow like weeds on a neglected tomb.
When all is done, out in the wide Campagna,
I will pile up my silver and my gold ;
My costly robes, paintings and tapestries ;
My parchments and all records of my wealth,
And make a bonfire in my joy, and leave
Of my possessions nothing but my name ;
Which shall be an inheritance to strip
Its wearer bare as infamy. That done,
My soul, which is a scourge, will I resign
Into the hands of him who wielded it ;
Be it for its own punishment or theirs,
He will not ask it of me till the lash
Be broken in its last and deepest wound ;
Until its hate be all inflicted. Yet,
Lest death outspeed my purpose let me make
Short work and sure . . . [Going.

LUCRETIA (*stops him*)

Oh, stay ! It was a feint :

The Cenci

She had no vision, and she heard no voice.
I said it but to awe thee.

CENCI

That is well.
Vile palterer with the sacred truth of God,
Be thy soul choked with that blaspheming lie!
For Beatrice worse terrors are in store
To bend her to my will.

LUCRETIA

Oh! to what will?
What cruel sufferings more than she has known
Canst thou inflict?

CENCI

Andrea! Go call my daughter,
And if she comes not tell her that I come.
What sufferings? I will drag her, step by step,
Thro' infamies unheard of among men:
She shall stand shelterless in the broad noon
Of public scorn, for acts blazoned abroad,
One among which shall be . . . What? Canst
thou guess?

The Cenci

She shall become (for what she most abhors
Shall have a fascination to entrap
Her loathing will) to her own conscious self
All she appears to others ; and when dead,
As she shall die unshrived and unforgiven,
A rebel to her father and her God,
Her corpse shall be abandoned to the hounds ;
Her name shall be the terror of the earth ;
Her spirit shall approach the throne of God
Plague-spotted with my curses. I will make
Body and soul a monstrous lump of ruin.

Enter ANDREA.

ANDREA

The Lady Beatrice . . .

CENCI

Speak, pale slave ! What
Said she ?

ANDREA

My Lord, 'twas what she looked ; she said :
"Go tell my father that I see the gulf

The Cenci

Of Hell between us two, which he may pass,
I will not." [Exit ANDREA.]

CENCI

Go thou quick, Lucretia,
Tell her to come ; yet let her understand
Her coming is consent : and say, moreover,
That if she come not I will curse her.

[Exit LUCRETIA.]

Ha !

With what but with a father's curse doth God
Panic-strike armèd victory, and make pale
Cities in their prosperity ? The world's Father
Must grant a parent's prayer against his child
Be he who asks even what men call me.
Will not the deaths of her rebellious brothers
Awe her before I speak ? For I on them
Did imprecate quick ruin, and it came.

Enter LUCRETIA.

Well ; what ? Speak, wretch !

LUCRETIA

She said, " I cannot come ;

The Cenci

Go tell my father that I see a torrent
Of his own blood raging between us."

CENCI (*kneeling*)

God!

Hear me! If this most specious mass of
flesh,
Which thou hast made my daughter; this my
blood,
This particle of my divided being;
Or rather, this my bane and my disease,
Whose sight infects and poisons me; this devil
Which sprung from me as from a hell, was
meant
To aught good use; if her bright loveliness
Was kindled to illumine this dark world;
If nursed by thy selectest dew of love
Such virtues blossom in her as should make
The peace of life, I pray thee for my sake,
As thou the common God and Father art
Of her, and me, and all; reverse that doom!
Earth, in the name of God, let her food be
Poison, until she be encrusted round

The Cenci

With leprous stains! Heaven, rain upon her
head

The blistering drops of the Maremma's dew,
Till she be speckled like a toad; parch up
Those love-enkindled lips, warp those fine
limbs

To loathèd lameness! All-beholding sun,
Strike in thine envy those life-darting eyes
With thine own blinding beams!

LUCRETIA

Peace! Peace!

For thine own sake unsay those dreadful words.
When high God grants he punishes such
prayers.

CENCI

*(Leaping up, and throwing his right hand toward
Heaven.)*

He does his will, I mine! This in addition,
That if she have a child . . .

LUCRETIA

Horrible thought!

The Cenci

CENCI

That if she ever have a child ; and thou,
Quick Nature ! I adjure thee by thy God,
That thou be fruitful in her, and increase
And multiply, fulfilling his command,
And my deep imprecation ! May it be
A hideous likeness of herself, that as
From a distorting mirror, she may see
Her image mixed with what she most abhors,
Smiling upon her from her nursing breast.
And that the child may from its infancy
Grow, day by day, more wicked and deformed,
Turning her mother's love to misery :
And that both she and it may live until
It shall repay her care and pain with hate,
Or what may else be more unnatural.
So he may hunt her through the clamorous
 scoffs
Of the loud world to a dishonoured grave.
Shall I revoke this curse ? Go, bid her come,
Before my words are chronicled in Heaven.

[*Exit* LUCRETIA.]

The Cenci

I do not feel as if I were a man,
But like a fiend appointed to chastise
The offences of some unremembered world.
My blood is running up and down my veins ;
A fearful pleasure makes it prick and tingle :
I feel a giddy sickness of strange awe ;
My heart is beating with an expectation
Of horrid joy.

Enter LUCRETIA.

What? Speak!

LUCRETIA

She bids thee curse ;
And if thy curses, as they cannot do,
Could kill her soul . . .

CENCI

She would not come. 'Tis well,
I can do both : first take what I demand,
And then extort concession. To thy chamber!
Fly ere I spurn thee : and beware this night
That thou cross not my footsteps. It were
safer

The Cenci

To come between the tiger and his prey.

[*Exit* LUCRETIA.]

It must be late; mine eyes grow weary
dim

With unaccustomed heaviness of sleep.

Conscience! Oh, thou most insolent of lies!

They say that sleep, that healing dew of
Heaven,

Steeps not in balm the foldings of the brain

Which thinks thee an impostor. I will go

First to belie thee with an hour of rest,

Which will be deep and calm, I feel: and
then . . .

O multitudinous Hell, the fiends will shake

Thine arches with the laughter of their
joy!

There shall be lamentation heard in Heaven

As o'er an angel fallen; and upon Earth

All good shall droop and sicken, and ill
things

Shall with a spirit of unnatural life

Stir and be quickened . . . even as I am now.

[*Exit.*]

The Cenci

SCENE II. — *Before the Castle of Petrella.*

*Enter BEATRICE and LUCRETIA above on the
Ramparts.*

BEATRICE

They come not yet.

LUCRETIA

'Tis scarce midnight.

BEATRICE

How slow
Behind the course of thought, even sick with
speed,
Lags leaden-footed time!

LUCRETIA

The minutes pass . . .
If he should wake before the deed is done?

BEATRICE

O mother! He must never wake again.
What thou hast said persuades me that our
act

The Cenci

Will but dislodge a spirit of deep hell
Out of a human form.

LUCRETIA

'Tis true he spoke
Of death and judgment with strange confidence
For one so wicked ; as a man believing
In God, yet recking not of good or ill.
And yet to die without confession ! . . .

BEATRICE

Oh!

Believe that Heaven is merciful and just,
And will not add our dread necessity
To the amount of his offences.

Enter OLIMPIO and MARZIO, below.

LUCRETIA

See,

They come.

BEATRICE

All mortal things must hasten thus
To their dark end. Let us go down.

[Exeunt LUCRETIA and BEATRICE from above.]

The Cenci

OLIMPIO

How feel you to this work?

MARZIO

As one who thinks
A thousand crowns excellent market price
For an old murderer's life. Your cheeks are
pale.

OLIMPIO

It is the white reflection of your own,
Which you call pale.

MARZIO

Is that their natural hue?

OLIMPIO

Or 'tis my hate and the deferred desire
To wreak it, which extinguishes their blood.

MARZIO

You are inclined then to this business?

The Cenci

OLIMPIO

Ay.

If one should bribe me with a thousand
crowns

To kill a serpent which had stung my child,
I could not be more willing.

Enter BEATRICE and LUCRETIA, below.

Noble ladies!

BEATRICE

Are ye resolved?

OLIMPIO

Is he asleep?

MARZIO

Is all

Quiet?

LUCRETIA

I mixed an opiate with his drink :
He sleeps so soundly . . .

The Cenci

BEATRICE

That his death will be
But as a change of sin-chastising dreams,
A dark continuance of the Hell within him,
Which God extinguish ! But ye are resolved ?
Ye know it is a high and holy deed ?

OLIMPIO

We are resolved.

MARZIO

As to the how this act
Be warranted, it rests with you.

BEATRICE

Well, follow !

OLIMPIO

Hush ! Hark ! What noise is that ?

MARZIO

Ha ! some one comes !

BEATRICE

Ye conscience-stricken cravens, rock to rest
Your baby hearts. It is the iron gate,

The Cenci

Which ye left open, swinging to the wind,
That enters whistling as in scorn. Come,
follow!

And be your steps like mine, light, quick, and
bold. [Exeunt.]

SCENE III. — *An Apartment in the Castle.*

Enter BEATRICE and LUCRETIA.

LUCRETIA

They are about it now.

BEATRICE

Nay, it is done.

LUCRETIA

I have not heard him groan.

BEATRICE

He will not groan.

LUCRETIA

What sound is that?

The Cenci

BEATRICE

List! 'tis the tread of feet
About his bed.

LUCRETIA

My God!
If he be now a cold stiff corpse . . .

BEATRICE

O, fear not
What may be done, but what is left undone:
The act seals all.

Enter OLIMPIO and MARZIO.

Is it accomplished?

MARZIO

What?

OLIMPIO

Did you not call?

BEATRICE

When?

The Cenci

OLIMPIO

Now.

BEATRICE

I ask if all is over?

OLIMPIO

We dare not kill an old and sleeping man ;
His thin gray hair, his stern and reverent
brow,
His veined hands crossed on his heaving
breast,
And the calm innocent sleep in which he lay,
Quelled me. Indeed, indeed, I cannot do it.

MARZIO

But I was bolder ; for I chid Olimpio,
And bade him bear his wrongs to his own
grave
And leave me the reward. And now my
knife
Touched the loose wrinkled throat, when the
old man

The Cenci

Stirred in his sleep, and said, "God! hear, O,
hear,
A father's curse! What, art thou not our
father?"

And then he laughed. I knew it was the ghost
Of my dead father speaking through his lips,
And could not kill him.

BEATRICE

Miserable slaves!

Where, if ye dare not kill a sleeping man,
Found ye the boldness to return to me
With such a deed undone? Base palterers!
Cowards and traitors! Why, the very con-
science

Which ye would sell for gold and for revenge
Is an equivocation: it sleeps over
A thousand daily acts disgracing men;
And when a deed where mercy insults
Heaven . . .

Why do I talk?

*[Snatching a dagger from one of them and
raising it.]*

The Cenci

Hadst thou a tongue to say,
She murdered her own father, I must do it!
But never dream ye shall outlive him long!

OLIMPIO

Stop, for God's sake!

MARZIO

I will go back and kill him.

OLIMPIO

Give me the weapon, we must do thy will.

BEATRICE

Take it! Depart! Return!

[Exeunt OLIMPIO and MARZIO.]

How pale thou art!

We do but that which 'twere a deadly crime
To leave undone.

LUCRETIA

Would it were done!

The Cenci

BEATRICE

Even whilst
That doubt is passing through your mind, the
world
Is conscious of a change. Darkness and Hell
Have swallowed up the vapour they sent forth
To blacken the sweet light of life. My breath
Comes, methinks, lighter, and the jellied blood
Runs freely thro' my veins. Hark!

Enter OLIMPIO and MARZIO.

He is . . .

OLIMPIO

Dead!

MARZIO

We strangled him that there might be no
blood;
And then we threw his heavy corpse i' the
garden
Under the balcony; 'twill seem it fell.

BEATRICE (*giving them a bag of coin*)

Here, take this gold, and hasten to your homes.

The Cenci

And, Marzio, because thou wast only awed
By that which made me tremble, wear thou
this! [*Clotbes him in a rich mantle.*

It was the mantle which my grandfather
Wore in his high prosperity, and men
Envied his state: so may they envy thine.
Thou wert a weapon in the hand of God
To a just use. Live long and thrive! And,
mark,
If thou hast crimes, repent: this deed is none.
 [*A horn is sounded.*

LUCRETIA

Hark, 'tis the castle horn; my God! it sounds
Like the last trump.

BEATRICE

Some tedious guest is coming.

LUCRETIA

The drawbridge is let down; there is a tramp
Of horses in the court; fly, hide yourselves!
 [*Exeunt OLIMPIO and MARZIO.*

The Cenci

BEATRICE

Let us retire to counterfeit deep rest ;
I scarcely need to counterfeit it now :
The spirit which doth reign within these limbs
Seems strangely undisturbed. I could even
sleep
Fearless and calm : all ill is surely past.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.— *Another Apartment in the Castle.*

Enter on one side the LEGATE SAVELLA, introduced by a Servant, and on the other LUCRETIA and BERNARDO.

SAVELLA

Lady, my duty to his Holiness
Be my excuse that thus unseasonably
I break upon your rest. I must speak with
Count Cenci ; doth he sleep ?

LUCRETIA (*in a hurried and confused manner*)

I think he sleeps ;
Yet wake him not, I pray, spare me awhile,

The Cenci

He is a wicked and a wrathful man ;
Should he be roused out of his sleep to-night,
Which is, I know, a hell of angry dreams,
It were not well ; indeed it were not well.
Wait till day break . . . (*aside*) O, I am deadly
sick !

SAVELLA

I grieve thus to distress you, but the Count
Must answer charges of the gravest import,
And suddenly ; such my commission is.

LUCRETIA (*with increased agitation*)

I dare not rouse him : I know none who
dare . . .
'Twere perilous ; . . . you might as safely
waken
A serpent ; or a corpse in which some fiend
Were laid to sleep.

SAVELLA

Lady, my moments here
Are counted. I must rouse him from his sleep,
Since none else dare.

The Cenci

LUCRETIA (*aside*)

O, terror! O, despair!
(*To* BERNARDO.) Bernardo, conduct you the
Lord Legate to
Your father's chamber.

[*Exeunt* SAVELLA and BERNARDO.]

Enter BEATRICE.

BEATRICE

'Tis a messenger
Come to arrest the culprit who now stands
Before the throne of unappealable God.
Both Earth and Heaven, consenting arbiters,
Acquit our deed.

LUCRETIA

Oh, agony of fear!
Would that he yet might live! Even now I
heard
The Legate's followers whisper as they passed
They had a warrant for his instant death.
All was prepared by unforbidden means
Which we must pay so dearly, having done.

The Cenci

Even now they search the tower, and find the
body ;
Now they suspect the truth ; now they consult
Before they come to tax us with the fact ;
O, horrible, 'tis all discovered !

BEATRICE

Mother,
What is done wisely, is done well. Be bold
As thou art just. 'Tis like a truant child
To fear that others know what thou hast done,
Even from thine own strong consciousness, and
thus
Write on unsteady eyes and altered cheeks
All thou wouldst hide. Be faithful to thyself,
And fear no other witness but thy fear.
For if, as cannot be, some circumstance
Should rise in accusation, we can blind
Suspicion with such cheap astonishment,
Or overbear it with such guiltless pride,
As murderers cannot feign. The deed is done,
And what may follow now regards not me.
I am as universal as the light ;

The Cenci

Free as the earth-surrounding air ; as firm
As the world's centre. Consequence, to me,
Is as the wind which strikes the solid rock
But shakes it not. [*A cry within and tumult.*]

VOICES

Murder ! Murder ! Murder !

Enter BERNARDO *and* SAVELLA.

SAVELLA (*to his followers*)

Go search the castle round ; sound the alarm ;
Look to the gates that none escape !

BEATRICE

What now ?

BERNARDO

I know not what to say . . . my father's dead.

BEATRICE

How ; dead ! he only sleeps ; you mistake,
brother.

His sleep is very calm, very like death ;
'Tis wonderful how well a tyrant sleeps.
He is not dead ?

The Cenci

BERNARDO

Dead ; murdered.

LUCRETIA (*with extreme agitation*)

Oh no, no,
He is not murdered though he may be dead ;
I have alone the keys of those apartments.

SAVELLA

Ha! Is it so?

BEATRICE

My Lord, I pray excuse us ;
We will retire ; my mother is not well :
She seems quite overcome with this strange
horror. [*Exeunt LUCRETIA and BEATRICE.*]

SAVELLA

Can you suspect who may have murdered
him?

BERNARDO

I know not what to think.

The Cenci

SAVELLA

Can you name any
Who had an interest in his death?

BERNARDO

Alas !

I can name none who had not, and those most
Who most lament that such a deed is done ;
My mother, and my sister, and myself.

SAVELLA

'Tis strange! There were clear marks of
violence.

I found the old man's body in the moonlight
Hanging beneath the window of his chamber,
Among the branches of a pine : he could not
Have fallen there, for all his limbs lay heaped
And effortless ; 'tis true there was no blood . . .
Favour me, Sir ; it much imports your house
That all should be made clear ; to tell the
ladies

That I request their presence.

[*Exit* BERNARDO.]

The Cenci

Enter GUARDS bringing in MARZIO.

GUARD

We have one.

OFFICER

My Lord, we found this ruffian and another
Lurking among the rocks ; there is no doubt
But that they are the murderers of Count
Cenci :

Each had a bag of coin ; this fellow wore
A gold-inwoven robe, which shining bright
Under the dark rocks to the glimmering moon
Betrayed them to our notice : the other fell
Desperately fighting.

SAVELLA

What does he confess ?

OFFICER

He keeps firm silence ; but these lines found
on him
May speak.

The Cenci

SAVELLA

Their language is at least sincere.

[*Reads.*

“TO THE LADY BEATRICE:—That the atonement of what my nature sickens to conjecture may soon arrive, I send thee, at thy brother’s desire, those who will speak and do more than I dare write. . . . Thy devoted servant,
ORSINO.”

Enter LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, *and* BERNARDO.

Knowest thou this writing, Lady?

BEATRICE

No.

SAVELLA

Nor thou?

LUCRETIA

(Her conduct throughout the scene is marked by extreme agitation.)

Where was it found? What is it? It should
be

The Cenci

Orsino's hand! It speaks of that strange
horror
Which never yet found utterance, but which
made
Between that hapless child and her dead father
A gulf of obscure hatred.

SAVELLA

Is it so?
Is it true, Lady, that thy father did
Such outrages as to awaken in thee
Unfilial hate?

BEATRICE

Not hate, 'twas more than hate:
This is most true, yet wherefore question me?

SAVELLA

There is a deed demanding question done;
Thou hast a secret which will answer not.

BEATRICE

What sayest? My Lord, your words are bold
and rash.

The Cenci

SAVELLA

I do arrest all present in the name
Of the Pope's Holiness. You must to Rome.

LUCRETIA

O, not to Rome! Indeed we are not guilty.

BEATRICE

Guilty! Who dares talk of guilt? My Lord,
I am more innocent of parricide
Than is a child born fatherless. . . . Dear
mother,

Your gentleness and patience are no shield
For this keen-judging world, this two-edged
lie,

Which seems, but is not. What! will human
laws,

Rather will ye who are their ministers,
Bar all access to retribution first,
And then, when Heaven doth interpose to do
What ye neglect, arming familiar things
To the redress of an unwonted crime,

The Cenci

Make ye the victims who demanded it
Culprits? 'Tis ye are culprits! That poor
wretch
Who stands so pale, and trembling, and
amazed,
If it be true he murdered Cenci, was
A sword in the right hand of justest God.
Wherefore should I have wielded it? Unless
The crimes which mortal tongue dare never
name
God therefore scruples to avenge.

SAVELLA

You own
That you desired his death?

BEATRICE

It would have been
A crime no less than his, if for one moment
That fierce desire had faded in my heart.
'Tis true I did believe, and hope, and pray,
Ay, I even knew . . . for God is wise and
just,

The Cenci

That some strange sudden death hung over
him.

'Tis true that this did happen, and most true
There was no other rest for me on earth,
No other hope in Heaven . . . now what of
this?

SAVELLA

Strange thoughts beget strange deeds ; and here
are both :
I judge thee not.

BEATRICE

And yet, if you arrest me,
You are the judge and executioner
Of that which is the life of life : the breath
Of accusation kills an innocent name,
And leaves for lame acquittal the poor life
Which is a mask without it. 'Tis most false
That I am guilty of foul parricide ;
Although I must rejoice, for justest cause,
That other hands have sent my father's soul
To ask the mercy he denied to me.
Now leave us free ; stain not a noble house

The Cenci

With vague surmises of rejected crime ;
Add to our sufferings and your own neglect
No heavier sum : let them have been enough :
Leave us the wreck we have.

SAVELLA

I dare not, Lady.
I pray that you prepare yourselves for Rome :
There the Pope's further pleasure will be
known.

LUCRETIA

O, not to Rome ! O, take us not to Rome !

BEATRICE

Why not to Rome, dear mother ? There as
here
Our innocence is as an armèd heel
To trample accusation. God is there
As here, and with his shadow ever clothes
The innocent, the injured and the weak ;
And such are we. Cheer up, dear Lady, lean
On me ; collect your wandering thoughts. My
Lord,

The Cenci

As soon as you have taken some refreshment,
And had all such examinations made
Upon the spot, as may be necessary
To the full understanding of this matter,
We shall be ready. Mother; will you come?

LUCRETIA

Ha! they will bind us to the rack, and wrest
Self-accusation from our agony!
Will Giacomo be there? Orsino? Marzio?
All present; all confronted; all demanding
Each from the other's countenance the thing
Which is in every heart! O, misery!

[She faints, and is borne out.]

SAVELLA

She faints: an ill appearance this.

BEATRICE

My Lord,
She knows not yet the uses of the world.
She fears that power is as a beast which grasps
And loosens not: a snake whose look trans-
mutes

The Cenci

All things to guilt which is its nutriment.
She cannot know how well the supine slaves
Of blind authority read the truth of things
When written on a brow of guilelessness :
She sees not yet triumphant Innocence
Stand at the judgment-seat of mortal man,
A judge and an accuser of the wrong
Which drags it there. Prepare yourself, my
Lord ;
Our suite will join yours in the court below.
[*Exeunt.*

END OF THE FOURTH ACT





ACT V.

SCENE I.— *An Apartment in Orsino's Palace.*

Enter ORSINO and GIACOMO.

GIACOMO



O evil deeds thus quickly come to end?

O, that the vain remorse which must chastise

Crimes done, had but as loud a voice to warn
As its keen sting is mortal to avenge!
O, that the hour when present had cast off
The mantle of its mystery, and shown
The ghastly form with which it now returns
When its scared game is roused, cheering the
hounds

Of conscience to their prey! Alas! Alas!
It was a wicked thought, a piteous deed,
To kill an old and hoary-headed father.

The Cenci

ORSINO

It has turned out unluckily, in truth.

GIACOMO

To violate the sacred doors of sleep ;
To cheat kind nature of the placid death
Which she prepares for overwearied age ;
To drag from Heaven an unrepentant soul
Which might have quenched in reconciling
prayers
A life of burning crimes . . .

ORSINO

You cannot say
I urged you to the deed.

GIACOMO

O, had I never
Found in thy smooth and ready countenance
The mirror of my darkest thoughts ; hadst
thou
Never with hints and questions made me look

The Cenci

Upon the monster of my thought, until
It grew familiar to desire . . .

ORSINO

'Tis thus

Men cast the blame of their unprosperous acts
Upon the abettors of their own resolve ;
Or anything but their weak, guilty selves.
And yet, confess the truth, it is the peril
In which you stand that gives you this pale
sickness

Of penitence; confess 'tis fear disguised
From its own shame that takes the mantle now
Of thin remorse. What if we yet were safe ?

GIACOMO

How can that be? Already Beatrice,
Lucretia and the murderer are in prison.
I doubt not officers are, whilst we speak,
Sent to arrest us.

ORSINO

I have all prepared
For instant flight. We can escape even now,
So we take fleet occasion by the hair.

The Cenci

ORSINO

Put up your weapon.

Is it the desperation of your fear
Makes you thus rash and sudden with a friend,
Now ruined for your sake? If honest anger
Have moved you, know, that what I just pro-
posed

Was but to try you. As for me, I think,
Thankless affection led me to this point,
From which, if my firm temper could repent,
I cannot now recede. Even whilst we speak
The ministers of justice wait below :
They grant me these brief moments. Now if
you

Have any word of melancholy comfort
To speak to your pale wife, 'twere best to pass
Out at the postern, and avoid them so.

GIACOMO

O, generous friend ! How canst thou pardon
me ?

Would that my life could purchase thine !

The Cenci

ORSINO

That wish
Now comes a day too late. Haste; fare thee
well!

Hear'st thou not steps along the corridor?

[*Exit* GIACOMO.]

I'm sorry for it; but the guards are waiting
At his own gate, and such was my contrivance
That I might rid me both of him and them.
I thought to act a solemn comedy
Upon the painted scene of this new world,
And to attain my own peculiar ends
By some such plot of mingled good and ill
As others weave; but there arose a Power
Which graspt and snapped the threads of my
device

And turned it to a net of ruin . . . Ha!

[*A shout is heard.*]

Is that my name I hear proclaimed abroad?
But I will pass, wrapt in a vile disguise;
Rags on my back, and a false innocence
Upon my face, thro' the misdeeming crowd

The Cenci

Which judges by what seems. 'Tis easy
then

For a new name and for a country new,
And a new life, fashioned on old desires,
To change the honours of abandoned Rome.
And these must be the masks of that within,
Which must remain unaltered . . . Oh, I
fear

That what is past will never let me rest!
Why, when none else is conscious, but my-
self,

Of my misdeeds, should my own heart's con-
tempt

Trouble me? Have I not the power to fly
My own reproaches? Shall I be the slave
Of . . . what? A word? which those of this
false world

Employ against each other, not themselves;
As men wear daggers not for self-offence.
But if I am mistaken, where shall I
Find the disguise to hide me from myself,
As now I skulk from every other eye?
[Exit.

The Cenci

SCENE II.—*A Hall of Justice.* CAMILLO,
JUDGES, *etc.*, *are discovered seated*; MARZIO
is led in.

FIRST JUDGE

Accused, do you persist in your denial?
I ask you, are you innocent, or guilty?
I demand who were the participators
In your offence? Speak truth and the whole
truth.

MARZIO

My God! I did not kill him; I know nothing;
Olimpio sold the robe to me from which
You would infer my guilt.

SECOND JUDGE

Away with him!

FIRST JUDGE

Dare you, with lips yet white from the rack's
kiss,
Speak false? Is it so soft a questioner,
That you would bandy lover's talk with it
Till it wind out your life and soul? Away!

The Cenci

MARZIO

Spare me! O, spare! I will confess.

FIRST JUDGE

Then speak.

MARZIO

I strangled him in his sleep.

FIRST JUDGE

Who urged you to it?

MARZIO

His own son Giacomo, and the young prelate
Orsino sent me to Petrella; there
The ladies Beatrice and Lucretia
Tempted me with a thousand crowns, and I
And my companion forthwith murdered him.
Now let me die.

FIRST JUDGE

This sounds as bad as truth. Guards, there,
Lead forth the prisoner!

The Cenci

Enter LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, *and* GIACOMO,
guarded.

Look upon this man ;
When did you see him last ?

BEATRICE

We never saw him.

MARZIO

You know me too well, Lady Beatrice.

BEATRICE

I know thee ! How ? where ? when ?

MARZIO

You know 'twas I
Whom you did urge with menaces and bribes
To kill your father. When the thing was done
You clothed me in a robe of woven gold
And bade me thrive : how I have thriven, you
see.

You, my Lord Giacomo, Lady Lucretia,

The Cenci

You know that what I speak is true.

[*BEATRICE advances toward him; he covers his face, and sbrinks back.*

O, dart

The terrible resentment of those eyes
On the dead earth! Turn them away from
me!

They wound: 'twas torture forced the truth.

My Lords,

Having said this let me be led to death.

BEATRICE

Poor wretch, I pity thee: yet stay awhile.

CAMILLO

Guards, lead him not away.

BEATRICE

Cardinal Camillo,

You have a good repute for gentleness
And wisdom: can it be that you sit here
To countenance a wicked farce like this?

The Cenci

When some obscure and trembling slave is
dragged
From sufferings which might shake the stern-
est heart
And bade to answer, not as he believes,
But as those may suspect or do desire
Whose questions thence suggest their own
reply :
And that in peril of such hideous torments
As merciful God spares even the damned.
Speak now
The thing you surely know, which is that you,
If your fine frame were stretched upon that
wheel,
And you were told: "Confess that you did
poison
Your little nephew; that fair blue-eyed child
Who was the loadstar of your life:" — and
though
All see, since his most swift and piteous death,
That day and night, and heaven and earth, and
time,
And all the things hoped for or done therein

The Cenci

Are changed to you, through your exceeding
grief,
Yet you would say, "I confess anything:"
And beg from your tormentors, like that slave,
The refuge of dishonourable death.
I pray thee, Cardinal, that thou assert
My innocence.

CAMILLO (*much moved*)

What shall we think, my Lords?
Shame on these tears! I thought the heart
was frozen
Which is their fountain. I would pledge my
soul
That she is guiltless.

JUDGE

Yet she must be tortured.

CAMILLO

I would as soon have tortured mine own
nephew
(If he now lived he would be just her age;

The Cenci

His hair, too, was her colour, and his eyes
Like hers in shape, but blue and not so deep)
As that most perfect image of God's love
That ever came sorrowing upon the earth.
She is as pure as speechless infancy !

JUDGE

Well, be her purity on your head, my Lord,
If you forbid the rack. His Holiness
Enjoined us to pursue this monstrous crime
By the severest forms of law ; nay even
To stretch a point against the criminals.
The prisoners stand accused of parricide
Upon such evidence as justifies
Torture.

BEATRICE

What evidence? This man's?

JUDGE

Even so.

BEATRICE (*to Marzio*)

Come near. And who art thou thus chosen
forth

The Cenci

Out of the multitude of living men
To kill the innocent?

MARZIO

I am Marzio,
Thy father's vassal.

BEATRICE

Fix thine eyes on mine;
Answer to what I ask. [*Turning to the Judges.*]
I prithee mark

His countenance: unlike bold calumny
Which sometimes dares not speak the thing it
looks,
He dares not look the thing he speaks, but
bends

His gaze on the blind earth.

(*To MARZIO.*) What! wilt thou say
That I did murder my own father?

MARZIO

Oh!

Spare me! My brain swims round . . . I
cannot speak . . .

The Cenci

It was that horrid torture forced the truth.
Take me away! Let her not look on me!
I am a guilty, miserable wretch;
I have said all I know; now, let me die!

BEATRICE

My Lords, if by my nature I had been
So stern as to have planned the crime al-
leged,

Which your suspicions dictate to this slave,
And the rack makes him utter, do you think
I should have left this two-edged instrument
Of my misdeed; this man, this bloody knife
With my own name engraven on the heft,
Lying unsheathed amid a world of foes,
For my own death? That with such horrible
need

For deepest silence, I should have neglected
So trivial a precaution as the making
His tomb the keeper of a secret written
On a thief's memory? What is his poor
life?

What are a thousand lives? A parricide

The Cenci

Had trampled them like dust; and, see, he
lives! [Turning to MARZIO.
And thou . . .

MARZIO

Oh, spare me! Speak to me no more!
That stern yet piteous look, those solemn
tones,
Wound worse than torture. [To the Judges.
I have told it all;
For pity's sake lead me away to death.

CAMILLO

Guards, lead him nearer the Lady Beatrice,
He shrinks from her regard like autumn's
leaf
From the keen breath of the serenest north.

BEATRICE

O thou who tremblest on the giddy verge
Of life and death, pause ere thou answerest
me;
So mayst thou answer God with less dismay:

The Cenci

What evil have we done thee? I, alas!
Have lived but on this earth a few sad years
And so my lot was ordered, that a father
First turned the moments of awakening life
To drops, each poisoning youth's sweet hope;
 and then
Stabbed with one blow my everlasting soul;
And my untainted fame; and even that peace
Which sleeps within the core of the heart's
 heart;
But the wound was not mortal; so my hate
Became the only worship I could lift
To our great father, who in pity and love,
Armed thee, as thou dost say, to cut him off;
And thus his wrong becomes my accusation;
And art thou the accuser? If thou hopest
Mercy in heaven, show justice upon earth:
Worse than a bloody hand is a hard heart.
If thou hast done murders, made thy life's
 path
Over the trampled laws of God and man,
Rush not before thy Judge, and say: "My
 maker,

The Cenci

I have done this and more ; for there was one
Who was most pure and innocent on earth ;
And because she endured what never any
Guilty or innocent endured before :
Because her wrongs could not be told, not
thought ;
Because thy hand at length did rescue her ;
I with my words killed her and all her kin.”
Think, I adjure you, what it is to slay
The reverence living in the minds of men
Towards our ancient house, and stainless fame !
Think what it is to strangle infant pity,
Cradled in the belief of guileless looks,
Till it become a crime to suffer. Think
What 'tis to blot with infamy and blood
All that which shows like innocence, and is,
Hear me, great God ! I swear, most inno-
cent,
So that the world lose all discrimination
Between the sly, fierce, wild regard of guilt,
And that which now compels thee to reply
To what I ask : Am I, or am I not
A parricide ?

The Cenci

MARZIO

Thou art not!

JUDGE

What is this?

MARZIO

I here declare those whom I did accuse
Are innocent. 'Tis I alone am guilty.

JUDGE

Drag him away to torments; let them be
Subtle and long drawn out, to tear the folds
Of the heart's inmost cell. Unbind him not
Till he confess.

MARZIO

Torture me as ye will:
A keener pain has wrung a higher truth
From my last breath. She is most innocent!
Bloodhounds, not men, glut yourselves well
with me;
I will not give you that fine piece of nature
To rend and ruin. [*Exit MARZIO, guarded.*]

The Cenci

CAMILLO

What say ye now, my Lords?

JUDGE

Let tortures strain the truth till it be white
As snow thrice sifted by the frozen wind.

CAMILLO

Yet stained with blood.

JUDGE (*to Beatrice*)

Know you this paper, Lady?

BEATRICE

Entrap me not with questions. Who stands
here

As my accuser? Ha! wilt thou be he,
Who art my judge? Accuser, witness, judge,
What, all in one? Here is Orsino's name;
Where is Orsino? Let his eye meet mine.
What means this scrawl? Alas! ye know not
what,

The Cenci

And therefore on the chance that it may be
Some evil, will ye kill us?

Enter an Officer.

OFFICER

Marzio's dead.

JUDGE

What did he say?

OFFICER

Nothing. As soon as we
Had bound him on the wheel, he smiled on us,
As one who baffles a deep adversary ;
And holding his breath, died.

JUDGE

There remains nothing
But to apply the question to those prisoners
Who yet remain stubborn.

CAMILLO

I overrule
Further proceedings, and in the behalf

The Cenci

Of these most innocent and noble persons
Will use my interest with the Holy Father.

JUDGE

Let the Pope's pleasure then be done. Mean-
while
Conduct these culprits each to separate cells ;
And be the engines ready : for this night
If the Pope's resolution be as grave,
Pious, and just as once, I'll wring the truth
Out of those nerves and sinews, groan by
groan. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE III. — *The Cell of a Prison.* BEATRICE
is discovered asleep on a couch.

Enter BERNARDO. ↗

BERNARDO

How gently slumber rests upon her face,
Like the last thoughts of some day sweetly
spent
Closing in night and dreams, and so prolonged.

Beatrice in Prison.

Pennock. "How can I be of service to you, my dear?"

THE COURT

THE COURT OF COMMONS
IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED

THE
SPEAKER

THE
SPEAKER

THE
SPEAKER

THE
SPEAKER

150

THE
SPEAKER

THE
SPEAKER





The Cenci

After such torments as she bore last night,
How light and soft her breathing comes. Ay,
me!

Methinks that I shall never sleep again.
But I must shake the heavenly dew of rest
From this sweet folded flower, thus . . .
wake! awake!
What, sister, canst thou sleep?

BEATRICE (*awaking*)

I was just dreaming
That we were all in Paradise. Thou knowest
This cell seems like a kind of Paradise
After our father's presence.

BERNARDO

Dear, dear sister,
Would that thy dream were not a dream! O
God!
How shall I tell?

BEATRICE

What wouldst thou tell, sweet brother?

The Cenci

BERNARDO

Look not so calm and happy, or even whilst
I stand considering what I have to say
My heart will break.

BEATRICE

See now, thou mak'st me weep :
How very friendless thou wouldst be, dear
child,
If I were dead. Say what thou hast to say.

BERNARDO

They have confessed ; they could endure no
more
The tortures . . .

BEATRICE

Ha ! What was there to confess ?
They must have told some weak and wicked lie
To flatter their tormentors. Have they said
That they were guilty ? O white innocence,
That thou shouldst wear the mask of guilt to
hide

The Cenci

Thine awful and serenest countenance
From those who know thee not!

*Enter JUDGE with LUCRETIA and GIACOMO,
guarded.*

Ignoble hearts!
For some brief spasms of pain, which are at
least
As mortal as the limbs through which they
pass,
Are centuries of high splendour laid in dust?
And that eternal honour which should live
Sunlike, above the reek of mortal fame,
Changed to a mockery and a bye-word?
What!

Will you give up these bodies to be dragged
At horses' heels, so that our hair should sweep
The footsteps of the vain and senseless crowd,
Who, that they may make our calamity
Their worship and their spectacle, will leave
The churches and the theatres as void
As their own hearts? Shall the light multitude
Fling, at their choice, curses or faded pity,

The Cenci

Sad funeral flowers to deck a living corpse,
Upon us as we pass to pass away,
And leave . . . what memory of our having
been?

Infamy, blood, terror, despair? O thou,
Who wert a mother to the parentless,
Kill not thy child! Let not her wrongs kill
thee!

Brother, lie down with me upon the rack,
And let us each be silent as a corpse;
It soon will be as soft as any grave.
'Tis but the falsehood it can wring from fear
Makes the rack cruel.

GIACOMO

They will tear the truth
Even from thee at last, those cruel pains:
For pity's sake say thou art guilty now.

LUCRETIA

Oh, speak the truth! Let us all quickly die;
And after death, God is our judge, not they;
He will have mercy on us.

The Cenci

BERNARDO

If indeed

It can be true, say so, dear sister mine ;
And then the Pope will surely pardon you,
And all be well.

JUDGE

Confess, or I will warp
Your limbs with such keen tortures . . .

BEATRICE

Tortures ! Turn

The rack henceforth into a spinning-wheel !
Torture your dog, that he may tell when last
He lapped the blood his master shed . . . not
me !

My pangs are of the mind, and of the heart,
And of the soul ; ay, of the inmost soul,
Which weeps within tears as of burning gall
To see, in this ill world where none are true,
My kindred false to their deserted selves.
And with considering all the wretched life
Which I have lived, and its now wretched end,

The Cenci

And the small justice shown by Heaven and
Earth

To me or mine ; and what a tyrant thou art,
And what slaves these ; and what a world we
make,

The oppressor and the oppressed . . . such
pangs compel

My answer. What is it thou wouldst with
me ?

JUDGE

Art thou not guilty of thy father's death ?

BEATRICE

Or wilt thou rather tax high judging God
That he permitted such an act as that
Which I have suffered, and which he beheld ;
Made it unutterable, and took from it
All refuge, all revenge, all consequence,
But that which thou hast called my father's
death ?

Which is or is not what men call a crime,
Which either I have done, or have not done ;
Say what ye will. I shall deny no more.

The Cenci

If ye desire it thus, thus let it be,
And so an end of all. Now do your will ;
No other pains shall force another word.

JUDGE

She is convicted, but has not confessed.
Be it enough. Until their final sentence
Let none have converse with them. You,
 young Lord,
Linger not here !

BEATRICE

Oh, tear him not away !

JUDGE

Guards, do your duty.

BERNARDO (*embracing Beatrice*)

 Oh ! would ye divide
Body from soul ?

OFFICER

 That is the headsman's business.
[*Exeunt all but* LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, and
GIACOMO.]

The Cenci

GIACOMO

Have I confessed? Is it all over now?
No hope! No refuge! O weak, wicked tongue
Which hast destroyed me, would that thou
hadst been

Cut out and thrown to dogs first! To have
killed

My father first, and then betrayed my sister;
Ay, thee! the one thing innocent and pure
In this black guilty world, to that which I
So well deserve! My wife! my little ones!
Destitute, helpless, and I . . . Father! God!
Canst thou forgive even the unforgiving,
When their full hearts break thus, thus! . . .

[Covers his face and weeps.]

LUCRETIA

O my child!

To what a dreadful end are we all come!
Why did I yield? Why did I not sustain
Those torments? Oh, that I were all dissolved
Into these fast and unavailing tears,
Which flow and feel not!

The Cenci

BEATRICE

What 'twas weak to do,
'Tis weaker to lament, once being done ;
Take cheer ! The God who knew my wrong,
and made

Our speedy act the angel of his wrath,
Seems, and but seems, to have abandoned us.
Let us not think that we shall die for this.
Brother, sit near me ; give me your firm
hand,
You had a manly heart. Bear up ! Bear
up !

O dearest Lady, put your gentle head
Upon my lap, and try to sleep awhile :
Your eyes look pale, hollow, and overworn,
With heaviness of watching and slow grief.
Come, I will sing you some low, sleepy tune,
Not cheerful, nor yet sad ; some dull old
thing,

Some outworn and unused monotony,
Such as our country gossips sing and spin,
Till they almost forget they live : lie down !

The Cenci

So, that will do. Have I forgot the words?
Faith! They are sadder than I thought they
were.

SONG

False friend, wilt thou smile or weep
When my life is laid asleep?
Little cares for a smile or a tear,
The clay-cold corpse upon the bier!
Farewell! Heigho!
What is this whispers low?
There is a snake in thy smile, my dear;
And bitter poison within thy tear.

Sweet sleep, were death like to thee,
Or if thou couldst mortal be,
I would close these eyes of pain;
When to wake? Never again.

O World! Farewell!

Listen to the passing bell!
It says, thou and I must part,
With a light and a heavy heart.

[The scene closes.]

The Cenci

SCENE IV. — *A Hall of the Prison.*

Enter CAMILLO and BERNARDO.

CAMILLO

The Pope is stern ; not to be moved or bent.
He looked as calm and keen as is the engine
Which tortures and which kills, exempt itself
From aught that it inflicts ; a marble form,
A rite, a law, a custom : not a man.
He frowned, as if to frown had been the
trick

Of his machinery, on the advocates
Presenting the defences, which he tore
And threw behind, muttering with hoarse,
harsh voice :

“ Which among ye defended their old father
Killed in his sleep ? ” Then to another :

“ Thou
Dost this in virtue of thy place ; 'tis well.”
He turned to me then, looking deprecation,
And said these three words, coldly : “ They
must die.”

The Cenci

BERNARDO

And yet you left him not?

CAMILLO

I urged him still ;
Pleading, as I could guess, the devilish wrong
Which prompted your unnatural parent's death.
And he replied : " Paolo Santa Croce
Murdered his mother yester evening,
And he is fled. Parricide grows so rife
That soon, for some just cause no doubt, the
young
Will strangle us all, dozing in our chairs.
Authority, and power, and hoary hair
Are grown crimes capital. You are my
nephew,
You come to ask their pardon ; stay a moment ;
Here is their sentence ; never see me more
Till, to the letter, it be all fulfilled."

BERNARDO

O God, not so ! I did believe indeed
That all you said was but sad preparation

The Cenci

For happy news. Oh, there are words and
looks
To bend the sternest purpose! Once I knew
them,
Now I forget them at my dearest need.
What think you if I seek him out, and bathe
His feet and robe with hot and bitter tears?
Importune him with prayers, vexing his brain
With my perpetual cries, until in rage
He strike me with his pastoral cross, and
trample
Upon my prostrate head, so that my blood
May stain the senseless dust on which he
treads,
And remorse waken mercy? I will do it!
Oh, wait till I return! [Rushes out.

CAMILLO

Alas! poor boy!
A wreck-devoted seaman thus might pray
To the deaf sea.

Enter LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, and GIACOMO,
guarded.

The Cenci

BEATRICE

I hardly dare to fear
That thou bring'st other news than a just
pardon.

CAMILLO

May God in heaven be less inexorable
To the Pope's prayers, than he has been to
mine.
Here is the sentence and the warrant.

BEATRICE (*wildly*)

O

My God! Can it be possible I have
To die so suddenly? So young to go
Under the obscure, cold, rotting, wormy
ground!
To be nailed down into a narrow place;
To see no more sweet sunshine; hear no more
Blithe voice of living thing; muse not again
Upon familiar thoughts, sad, yet thus lost—
How fearful! to be nothing! Or to be . . .
What? Oh, where am I? Let me not go
mad!

The Cenci

Sweet Heaven, forgive weak thoughts! If
there should be

No God, no Heaven, no Earth in the void
world;

The wide, gray, lampless, deep, unpeopled
world!

If all things then should be . . . my father's
spirit,

His eye, his voice, his touch surrounding me;

The atmosphere and breath of my dead life!

If sometimes, as a shape more like himself,

Even the form which tortured me on earth,

Masked in gray hairs and wrinkles, he should
come

And wind me in his hellish arms, and fix

His eyes on mine, and drag me down, down,
down!

For was he not alone omnipotent

On Earth, and ever present? Even tho' dead,

Does not his spirit live in all that breathe,

And work for me and mine still the same
ruin,

Scorn, pain, despair? Who ever yet returned

The Cenci

To teach the laws of death's untrodden realm?
Unjust perhaps as those which drive us now,
Oh, whither, whither?

LUCRETIA

Trust in God's sweet love,
The tender promises of Christ: ere night,
Think, we shall be in Paradise.

BEATRICE

'Tis past!
Whatever comes my heart shall sink no more.
And yet, I know not why, your words strike
chill:
How tedious, false, and cold seem all things. I
Have met with much injustice in this world;
No difference has been made by God or man,
Or any power moulding my wretched lot,
'Twixt good or evil, as regarded me.
I am cut off from the only world I know,
From light, and life, and love, in youth's sweet
prime.
You do well telling me to trust in God,

The Cenci

I hope I do trust in him. In whom else
Can any trust? And yet my heart is cold.

*[During the latter speeches GIACOMO has
retired conversing with CAMILLO, who
now goes out ; GIACOMO advances.]*

GIACOMO

Know you not, Mother . . . Sister, know you
not ?

Bernardo even now is gone to implore
The Pope to grant our pardon.

LUCRETIA

Child, perhaps
It will be granted. We may all then live
To make these woes a tale for distant years :
Oh, what a thought ! It gushes to my heart
Like the warm blood.

BEATRICE

Yet both will soon be cold.
Oh, trample out that thought ! Worse than
despair,

The Cenci

Worse than the bitterness of death, is hope :
It is the only ill which can find place
Upon the giddy, sharp, and narrow hour
Tottering beneath us. Plead with the swift
frost
That it should spare the eldest flower of
spring :
Plead with awakening earthquake, o'er whose
couch
Even now a city stands, strong, fair, and free ;
Now stench and blackness yawn, like death.
Oh, plead
With famine, or wind-walking Pestilence,
Blind lightning, or the deaf sea, not with man !
Cruel, cold, formal man ; righteous in words,
In deeds a Cain. No, Mother, we must die :
Since such is the reward of innocent lives ;
Such the alleviation of worst wrongs.
And whilst our murderers live, and hard, cold
men,
Smiling and slow, walk thro' a world of tears
To death as to life's sleep ; 'twere just the
grave

The Cenci

Were some strange joy for us. Come, obscure
Death,
And wind me in thine all-embracing arms !
Like a fond mother hide me in thy bosom,
And rock me to the sleep from which none
wake.
Live ye, who live, subject to one another
As we were once, who now . . .

[BERNARDO *rushes in.*

BERNARDO

Oh, horrible,
That tears, that looks, that hope poured forth
in prayer,
Even till the heart is vacant and despairs,
Should all be vain ! The ministers of death
Are waiting round the doors. I thought I saw
Blood on the face of one . . . What if 'twere
fancy ?
Soon the heart's blood of all I love on earth
Will sprinkle him, and he will wipe it off
As if 'twere only rain. O life ! O world !
Cover me ! let me be no more ! To see

The Cenci

That perfect mirror of pure innocence
Wherein I gazed, and grew happy and good,
Shivered to dust! To see thee, Beatrice,
Who made all lovely thou didst look upon . . .
Thee, light of life . . . dead, dark! while I
say, sister,
To hear I have no sister; and thou, Mother,
Whose love was as a bond to all our loves . . .
Dead! The sweet bond broken!

Enter CAMILLO and Guards

They come! Let me
Kiss those warm lips before their crimson
leaves
Are blighted . . . white . . . cold. Say fare-
well, before
Death chokes that gentle voice! Oh, let me
hear
You speak!

BEATRICE

Farewell, my tender brother. Think
Of our sad fate with gentleness, as now:
And let mild, pitying thoughts lighten for thee

The Cenci

Thy sorrow's load. Err not in harsh despair,
But tears and patience. One thing more, my
child,

For thine own sake be constant to the love
Thou bearest us; and to the faith that I,
Tho' wrapt in a strange cloud of crime and
shame,

Lived ever holy and unstained. And tho'
Ill tongues shall wound me, and our common
name

Be as a mark stamped on thine innocent brow
For men to point at as they pass, do thou
Forbear, and never think a thought unkind
Of those, who perhaps love thee in their
graves.

So mayest thou die as I do; fear and pain
Being subdued. Farewell! Farewell! Fare-
well!

BERNARDO

I cannot say, farewell!

CAMILLO

O Lady Beatrice!

The Cenci

BEATRICE

Give yourself no unnecessary pain,
My dear Lord Cardinal. Here, Mother, tie
My girdle for me, and bind up this hair
In any simple knot; ay, that does well.
And yours I see is coming down. How often
Have we done this for one another; now
We shall not do it any more. My Lord,
We are quite ready. Well, 'tis very well.

END OF THE FIFTH ACT





Note on "The Cenci," by Mrs. Shelley



HE sort of mistake that Shelley made as to the extent of his own genius and powers, which led him deviously at first, but lastly into the direct track that enabled him fully to develop them, is a curious instance of his modesty of feeling, and of the methods which the human mind uses at once to deceive itself, and yet, in its very delusion, to make its way out of error into the path which Nature has marked out as its right one. He often incited me to attempt the writing a tragedy: he conceived that I possessed some dramatic talent, and he was always most earnest and energetic

Note on "The Cenci"

in his exhortations that I should cultivate any talent I possessed, to the utmost. I entertained a truer estimate of my powers; and above all (though at that time not exactly aware of the fact) I was far too young to have any chance of succeeding, even moderately, in a species of composition that requires a greater scope of experience in, and sympathy with, human passion than could then have fallen to my lot,—or than any perhaps, except Shelley, ever possessed, even at the age of twenty-six, at which he wrote "The Cenci."

On the other hand, Shelley most erroneously conceived himself to be destitute of this talent. He believed that one of the first requisites was the capacity of forming and following up a story or plot. He fancied himself to be defective in this portion of imagination: it was that which gave him least pleasure in the writings of others, though he laid great store by it as the proper framework to support the sublimest efforts of poetry. He asserted that he was too metaphysical and abstract, too fond of the theoretical and the ideal to succeed as a tragedian. It perhaps is not strange that

Note on "The Cenci"

I shared this opinion with himself; for he had hitherto shown no inclination for, nor given any specimen of his powers in framing and supporting the interest of a story, either in prose or verse. Once or twice, when he attempted such, he had speedily thrown it aside, as being even disagreeable to him as an occupation.

The subject he had suggested for a tragedy was Charles I.; and he had written to me: "Remember, remember Charles I. I have been already imagining how you would conduct some scenes. The second volume of 'St. Leon' begins with this proud and true sentiment: 'There is nothing which the human mind can conceive which it may not execute.' Shakespeare was only a human being." These words were written in 1818, while we were in Lombardy, when he little thought how soon a work of his own would prove a proud comment on the passage he quoted.

When in Rome, in 1819, a friend put into our hands the old manuscript account of the story of the Cenci. We visited the Colonna and Doria palaces, where the por-

Note on "The Cenci"

traits of Beatrice were to be found; and her beauty cast the reflection of its own grace over her appalling story. Shelley's imagination became strongly excited, and he urged the subject to me as one fitted for a tragedy. More than ever I felt my incompetence; but I entreated him to write it instead; and he began, and proceeded swiftly, urged on by intense sympathy with the sufferings of the human beings whose passions, so long cold in the tomb, he revived, and gifted with poetic language. This tragedy is the only one of his works that he communicated to me during its progress. We talked over the arrangement of the scenes together. I speedily saw the great mistake we had made, and triumphed in the discovery of the new talent brought to light from that mine of wealth (never, alas, through his untimely death, worked to its depths) — his richly gifted mind.

We suffered a severe affliction in Rome by the loss of our eldest child, who was of such beauty and promise as to cause him deservedly to be the idol of our hearts. We left the capital of the world, anxious for a time to escape a spot associated too intimately with his presence

Note on "The Cenci"

and loss.¹ Some friends of ours were residing in the neighbourhood of Leghorn, and we took a small house, Villa Valsovano, about half-way between the town and Monte Nero, where we remained during the summer. Our villa was situated in the midst of a *podere*; the peasants sang as they worked beneath our windows, during the heats of a very hot season, and in the evening the water-wheel creaked as the process of irrigation went on, and the fireflies flashed from among the myrtle hedges: Nature was bright, sunshiny, and cheerful, or diversified by storms of a majestic terror, such as we had never before witnessed.

At the top of the house there was a sort of terrace. There is often such in Italy, generally roofed: this one was very small, yet not only roofed but glazed. This Shelley made his

¹ Such feelings haunted him when, in "The Cenci," he makes Beatrice speak to Cardinal Camillo of —

"that fair blue-eyed child

Who was the loadstar of your life" —

and say —

"All see, since his most swift and piteous death,
That day and night, and heaven and earth, and time,
And all the things hoped for or done therein,
Are changed to you, through your exceeding grief."

Note on “The Cenci”

study; it looked out on a wide prospect of fertile country, and commanded a view of the near sea. The storms that sometimes varied our day showed themselves most picturesquely as they were driven across the ocean; sometimes the dark lurid clouds dipped toward the waves, and became water-spouts that churned up the waters beneath, as they were chased onward and scattered by the tempest. At other times the dazzling sunlight and heat made it almost intolerable to every other; but Shelley basked in both, and his health and spirits revived under their influence. In this airy cell he wrote the principal part of “The Cenci.” He was making a study of Calderon at the time, reading his best tragedies with an accomplished lady living near us, to whom his letter from Leghorn was addressed during the following year. He admired Calderon, both for his poetry and his dramatic genius; but it shows his judgment and originality that, though greatly struck by his first acquaintance with the Spanish poet, none of his peculiarities crept into the composition of “The Cenci;” and there is no trace of his new studies, except in that passage to which he himself alludes as

Note on "The Cenci"

suggested by one in "El Purgatorio de San Patricio."

Shelley wished "The Cenci" to be acted. He was not a playgoer, being of such fastidious taste that he was easily disgusted by the bad filling up of the inferior parts. While preparing for our departure from England, however, he saw Miss O'Neil several times. She was then in the zenith of her glory; and Shelley was deeply moved by her impersonation of several parts, and by the graceful sweetness, the intense pathos, and sublime vehemence of passion she displayed. She was often in his thoughts as he wrote: and, when he had finished, he became anxious that his tragedy should be acted, and receive the advantage of having this accomplished actress to fill the part of the heroine. With this view he wrote the following letter to a friend in London:

"The object of the present letter is to ask a favour of you. I have written a tragedy on a story well known in Italy, and, in my conception, eminently dramatic. I have taken some pains to make my play fit for representation, and those who have already seen it judge favourably. It is written without any of the

Note on "The Cenci"

peculiar feelings and opinions which characterize my other compositions; I have attended simply to the impartial development of such characters as it is probable the persons represented really were, together with the greatest degree of popular effect to be produced by such a development. I send you a translation of the Italian MS. on which my play is founded; the chief circumstance of which I have touched very delicately; for my principal doubt as to whether it would succeed as an acting play hangs entirely on the question as to whether any such a thing as incest in this shape, however treated, would be admitted on the stage. I think, however, it will form no objection; considering, first, that the facts are matter of history, and, secondly, the peculiar delicacy with which I have treated it.¹

“ I am exceedingly interested in the question of whether this attempt of mine will succeed or

¹In speaking of his mode of treating this main incident, Shelley said that it might be remarked that, in the course of the play, he had never mentioned expressly Cenci's worst crime. Every one knew what it must be, but it was never imaged in words — the nearest allusion to it being that portion of Cenci's curse beginning —

“That, if she have a child,” etc.

Note on "The Cenci"

not. I am strongly inclined to the affirmative at present; founding my hopes on this — that, as a composition, it is certainly not inferior to any of the modern plays that have been acted, with the exception of 'Remorse'; that the interest of the plot is incredibly greater and more real; and that there is nothing beyond what the multitude are contented to believe that they can understand, either in imagery, opinion, or sentiment. I wish to preserve a complete incognito, and can trust to you that, whatever else you do, you will at least favour me on this point. Indeed, this is essential, deeply essential, to its success. After it had been acted, and successfully (could I hope for such a thing), I would own it if I pleased, and use the celebrity it might acquire to my own purposes.

"What I want you to do is to procure for me its presentation at Covent Garden. The principal character, Beatrice, is precisely fitted for Miss O'Neil, and it might even seem to have been written for her (God forbid that I should see her play it—it would tear my nerves to pieces); and in all respects it is fitted only for Covent Garden. The chief

Note on "The Cenci"

male character I confess I should be very unwilling that any one but Kean should play. That is impossible, and I must be contented with an inferior actor."

The play was accordingly sent to Mr. Harris. He pronounced the subject to be so objectionable that he could not even submit the part to Miss O'Neil for perusal, but expressed his desire that the author would write a tragedy on some other subject, which he would gladly accept. Shelley printed a small edition at Leghorn, to ensure its correctness, as he was much annoyed by the many mistakes that crept into his text when distance prevented him from correcting the press.

Universal approbation soon stamped "The Cenci" as the best tragedy of modern times. Writing concerning it, Shelley said: "I have been cautious to avoid the introducing faults of youthful composition; diffuseness, a profusion of inapplicable imagery, vagueness, generality, and, as Hamlet says, *words, words.*" There is nothing that is not purely dramatic throughout; and the character of Beatrice, proceeding, from vehement struggle, to horror, to deadly resolution, and lastly to the elevated

Note on "The Cenci"

dignity of calm suffering, joined to passionate tenderness and pathos, is touched with hues so vivid and so beautiful that the poet seems to have read intimately the secrets of the noble heart imaged in the lovely countenance of the unfortunate girl. The fifth act is a masterpiece. It is the finest thing he ever wrote, and may claim proud comparison not only with any contemporary, but preceding, poet. The varying feelings of Beatrice are expressed with passionate, heart-reaching eloquence. Every character has a voice that echoes truth in its tones. It is curious, to one acquainted with the written story, to mark the success with which the poet has inwoven the real incidents of the tragedy into his scenes, and yet, through the power of poetry, has obliterated all that would otherwise have shown too harsh or too hideous in the picture. His success was a double triumph; and often after he was earnestly entreated to write again in a style that commanded popular favour, while it was not less instinct with truth and genius. But the bent of his mind went the other way; and, even when employed on subjects whose interest depended on character and incident, he

CHAPTER III "The Cenci"

... in another direction, and leave
... of intense passion, which he
... for fantastic
... of the ... of the expression of
... with regard to
... a desire to dif-
... of his soul.



The Mask of Anarchy

**Written on the Occasion of the Massacre
at Manchester**



The Mask of Anarchy



I.



AS I lay asleep in Italy
There came a voice from over
the Sea,
And with great power it forth
led me
To walk in the visions of Poesy.

II.

I met Murder on the way —
He had a mask like Castlereagh —
Very smooth he looked, yet grim ;
Seven bloodhounds followed him :

The Mask of Anarchy

III.

All were fat ; and well they might
Be in admirable plight,
For one by one, and two by two,
He tossed them human hearts to chew
Which from his wide cloak he drew.

IV.

Next came Fraud, and he had on,
Like Eldon, an ermined gown ;
His big tears, for he wept well,
Turned to millstones as they fell.

V.

And the little children, who
Round his feet played to and fro,
Thinking every tear a gem,
Had their brains knocked out by them.

VI.

Clothed with the Bible, as with light,
And the shadows of the night,
Like Sidmouth, next, Hypocrisy
On a crocodile rode by.

The Mask of Anarchy

VII.

And many more Destructions played
In this ghastly masquerade,
All disguised, even to the eyes,
Like Bishops, lawyers, peers, or spies.

VIII.

Last came Anarchy : he rode
On a white horse, splashed with blood ;
He was pale even to the lips,
Like Death in the Apocalypse.

IX.

And he wore a kingly crown ;
And in his grasp a sceptre shone ;
On his brow this mark I saw —
“ I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW ! ”

X.

With a pace stately and fast,
Over English land he past,
Trampling to a mire of blood
The adoring multitude.

The Mask of Anarchy

XI.

And a mighty troop around,
With their trampling shook the ground,
Waving each a bloody sword,
For the service of their Lord.

XII.

And with glorious triumph, they
Rode thro' England proud and gay,
Drunk as with intoxication
Of the wine of desolation.

XIII.

O'er fields and towns, from sea to sea,
Past the Pageant swift and free,
Tearing up, and trampling down;
Till they came to London town.

XIV.

And each dweller, panic-stricken,
Felt his heart with terror sicken
Hearing the tempestuous cry
Of the triumph of Anarchy.

The Mask of Anarchy

xv.

For with pomp to meet him came,
Clothed in arms like blood and flame,
The hired murderers, who did sing
“Thou art God, and Law, and King.

xvi.

“We have waited, weak and lone,
For thy coming, Mighty One!
Our purses are empty, our swords are cold,
Give us glory, and blood, and gold.”

xvii.

Lawyers and priests, a motley crowd,
To the earth their pale brows bowed;
Like a bad prayer not over loud,
Whispering — “Thou art Law and God.” —

xviii.

Then all cried with one accord,
“Thou art King, and God, and Lord;
Anarchy, to thee we bow,
Be thy name made holy now!”

The Mask of Anarchy

XIX.

And Anarchy, the Skeleton,
Bowed and grinned to every one,
As well as if his education
Had cost ten millions to the nation.

XX.

For he knew the Palaces
Of our Kings were rightly his ;
His the sceptre, crown, and globe,
And the gold-inwoven robe.

XXI.

So he sent his slaves before
To seize upon the Bank and Tower,
And was proceeding with intent
To meet his pensioned Parliament,

XXII.

When one fled past, a maniac maid,
And her name was Hope, she said :
But she looked more like Despair,
And she cried out in the air :

The Mask of Anarchy

XXIII.

“ My father Time is weak and gray
With waiting for a better day ;
See how idiot-like he stands,
Fumbling with his palsied hands !

XXIV.

“ He has had child after child,
And the dust of death is piled
Over every one but me —
Misery, oh, Misery ! ”

XXV.

Then she lay down in the street,
Right before the horses' feet,
Expecting, with a patient eye,
Murder, Fraud, and Anarchy.

XXVI.

When between her and her foes
A mist, a light, an image rose,
Small at first, and weak, and frail
Like the vapour of a vale :

The Mask of Anarchy

xxvii.

Till as clouds grow on the blast,
Like tower-crowned giants striding fast,
And glare with lightnings as they fly,
And speak in thunder to the sky,

xxviii.

It grew — a Shape arrayed in mail
Brighter than the viper's scale,
And upborne on wings whose grain
Was as the light of sunny rain.

xxix.

On its helm, seen far away,
A planet, like the Morning's, lay ;
And those plumes its light rained thro'
Like a shower of crimson dew.

xxx.

With step as soft as wind it past
O'er the heads of men — so fast
That they knew the presence there,
And looked, — and all was empty air.

The Mask of Anarchy

XXXI.

As flowers beneath May's footstep waken,
As stars from Night's loose hair are shaken,
As waves arise when loud winds call,
Thoughts sprung where'er that step did fall.

XXXII.

And the prostrate multitude
Looked — and ankle-deep in blood,
Hope, that maiden most serene,
Was walking with a quiet mien :

XXXIII.

And Anarchy, the ghastly birth,
Lay dead earth upon the earth ;
The Horse of Death tameless as wind
Fled, and with his hoofs did grind
To dust the murderers thronged behind.

XXXIV.

A rushing light of clouds and splendour,
A sense awakening and yet tender
Was heard and felt — and at its close
These words of joy and fear arose

The Mask of Anarchy

XXXV.

As if their own indignant Earth
Which gave the sons of England birth
Had felt their blood upon her brow,
And shuddering with a mother's throe

XXXVI.

Had turnèd every drop of blood
By which her face had been bedewed
To an accent unwithstood, —
As if her heart had cried aloud :

XXXVII.

“ Men of England, heirs of Glory,
Heroes of unwritten story,
Nurslings of one mighty Mother,
Hopes of her, and one another ;

XXXVIII.

“ Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you —
Ye are many — they are few.

The Mask of Anarchy

XXXIX.

“What is Freedom? — ye can tell
That which slavery is, too well —
For its very name has grown
To an echo of your own.

XL.

“’Tis to work and have such pay
As just keeps life from day to day
In your limbs, as in a cell
For the tyrants’ use to dwell

XLI.

“So that ye for them are made
Loom, and plough, and sword, and spade,
With or without your own will bent
To their defence and nourishment.

XLII.

“’Tis to see your children weak
With their mothers pine and peak,
When the winter winds are bleak, —
They are dying whilst I speak.

The Mask of Anarchy

XLIII.

“’Tis to hunger for such diet
As the rich man in his riot
Casts to the fat dogs that lie
Surfeiting beneath his eye ;

XLIV.

“’Tis to let the Ghost of Gold
Take from Toil a thousandfold
More than e’er its substance could
In the tyrannies of old.

XLV.

“ Paper coin — that forgery
Of the title deeds, which ye
Hold to something of the worth
Of the inheritance of Earth.

XLVI.

“’Tis to be a slave in soul
And to hold no strong controul
Over your own wills, but be
All that others make of ye.

The Mask of Anarchy

XLVII.

“ And at length when ye complain
With a murmur weak and vain,
’Tis to see the Tyrant’s crew
Ride over your wives and you —
Blood is on the grass like dew.

XLVIII.

“ Then it is to feel revenge
Fiercely thirsting to exchange
Blood for blood — and wrong for wrong —
Do not thus when ye are strong.

XLIX.

“ Birds find rest, in narrow nest
When weary of their wingèd quest;
Beasts find fare, in woody lair
When storm and snow are in the air.¹

¹ The following Stanza, originally intended to come between Stanzas XLIX. and L., was rejected:

“ Horses, oxen, have a home,
When from daily toil they come;
Household dogs, when the wind roars,
Find a home within warm doors.”

The Mask of Anarchy

L.

“ Asses, swine, have litter spread
And with fitting food are fed ;
All things have a home but one —
Thou, O Englishman, hast none !

LI.

“ This is Slavery — savage men,
Or wild beasts within a den,
Would endure not as ye do —
But such ills they never knew.

LII.

“ What art thou Freedom? Oh! could slaves
Answer from their living graves
This demand — tyrants would flee
Like a dream's dim imagery :

LIII.

“ Thou art not, as impostors say,
A shadow soon to pass away,
A superstition, and a name
Echoing from the cave of Fame.

The Mask of Anarchy

LIV.

“ For the labourer thou art bread,
And a comely table spread,
From his daily labour come
To a neat and happy home.

LV.

“ Thou are clothes, and fire, and food
For the trampled multitude —
No — in countries that are free
Such starvation cannot be
As in England now we see.

LVI.

“ To the rich thou art a check,
When his foot is on the neck
Of his victim, thou dost make
That he treads upon a snake.

LVII.

“ Thou art Justice — ne'er for gold
May thy righteous laws be sold
As laws are in England — thou
Shield'st alike the high and low.

The Mask of Anarchy

LVIII.

“Thou art Wisdom — Freemen never
Dream that God will damn for ever
All who think those things untrue
Of which Priests make such ado.

LIX.

“Thou art Peace — never by thee
Would blood and treasure wasted be
As tyrants wasted them, when all
Leagued to quench thy flame in Gaul.

LX.

“What if English toil and blood
Was poured forth, even as a flood?
It availed, O Liberty,
To dim, but not extinguish thee.

LXI.

“Thou art Love — the rich have kist
Thy feet, and like him following Christ
Give their substance to the free
And thro' the rough world follow thee,

The Mask of Anarchy

LXII.

“ Or turn their wealth to arms, and make
War for thy belovèd sake
On wealth, and war, and fraud — whence they
Drew the power which is their prey.

LXIII.

“ Science, Poetry, and Thought
Are thy lamps ; they make the lot
Of the dwellers in a cot
So serene, they curse it not.

LXIV.

“ Spirit, Patience, Gentleness,
All that can adorn and bless
Art thou — let deeds not words express
Thine exceeding loveliness.

LXV.

“ Let a great Assembly be
Of the fearless and the free
On some spot of English ground
Where the plains stretch wide around.

The Mask of Anarchy

LXVI.

“ Let the blue sky overhead,
The green earth on which ye tread,
All that must eternal be
Witness the solemnity.

LXVII.

“ From the corners uttermost
Of the bounds of English coast ;
From every hut, village, and town
Where those who live and suffer moan
For others' misery or their own,

LXVIII.

“ From the workhouse and the prison
Where pale as corpses newly risen,
Women, children, young and old
Groan for pain, and weep for cold —

LXIX.

“ From the haunts of daily life
Where is waged the daily strife
With common wants and common cares
Which sows the human heart with tares —

The Mask of Anarchy

LXX.

“ Lastly from the palaces
Where the murmur of distress
Echoes, like the distant sound
Of a wind alive around

LXXI.

“ Those prison halls of wealth and fashion
Where some few feel such compassion
For those who groan, and toil, and wail
As must make their brethren pale —

LXXII.

“ Ye who suffer woes untold,
Or to feel, or to behold
Your lost country bought and sold
With a price of blood and gold —

LXXIII.

“ Let a vast assembly be,
And with great solemnity
Declare with measured words that ye
Are, as God has made ye, free —

The Mask of Anarchy

LXXIV.

“ Be your strong and simple words
Keen to wound as sharpened swords,
And wide as targes let them be,
With their shade to cover ye.

LXXV.

“ Let the tyrants pour around
With a quick and startling sound,
Like the loosening of a sea,
Troops of armed emblazonry.

LXXVI.

“ Let the charged artillery drive
Till the dead air seems alive
With the clash of clanging wheels,
And the tramp of horses' heels.

LXXVII.

“ Let the fixèd bayonet
Gleam with sharp desire to wet
Its bright point in English blood
Looking keen as one for food.

The Mask of Anarchy

LXXVIII.

“ Let the horsemen’s scymitars
Wheel and flash, like sphereless stars
Thirsting to eclipse their burning
In a sea of death and mourning.

LXXIX.

“ Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute,
With folded arms and looks which are
Weapons of unvanquished war,

LXXX.

“ And let Panic, who outspeeds
The career of armèd steeds,
Pass, a disregarded shade,
Thro’ your phalanx undismayed.

LXXXI.

“ Let the laws of your own land,
Good or ill, between ye stand
Hand to hand, and foot to foot,
Arbiters of the dispute,

The Mask of Anarchy

LXXXII.

“ The old laws of England — they
Whose reverend heads with age are gray,
Children of a wiser day ;
And whose solemn voice must be
Thine own echo — Liberty !

LXXXIII.

“ On those who first should violate
Such sacred heralds in their state
Rest the blood that must ensue,
And it will not rest on you.

LXXXIV.

“ And if then the tyrants dare,
Let them ride among you there,
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew, —
What they like, that let them do.

LXXXV.

“ With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.

The Mask of Anarchy

LXXXVI.

“Then they will return with shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak
In hot blushes on their cheek.

LXXXVII.

“Every woman in the land
Will point at them as they stand—
They will hardly dare to greet
Their acquaintance in the street.

LXXXVIII.

“And the bold, true warriors
Who have hugged Danger in the wars
Will turn to those who would be free,
Ashamed of such base company.

LXXXIX.

“And that slaughter to the Nation
Shall steam up like inspiration,
Eloquent, oracular ;
A volcano heard afar.

The Mask of Anarchy

xc.

“ And these words shall then become
Like oppression’s thundered doom
Ringing thro’ each heart and brain,
Heard again — again — again —

xcI.

“ Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number —
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you —
Ye are many — they are few.”





Note on The Mask of Anarchy, by Mrs. Shelley



THOUGH Shelley's first eager desire to excite his countrymen to resist openly the oppressions existent during "the good old times" had faded with early youth, still his warmest sympathies were for the people. He was a republican, and loved a democracy. He looked on all human beings as inheriting an equal right to possess the dearest privileges of our nature; the necessaries of life when fairly earned by labour, and intellectual instruction. His hatred of any despotism that looked upon the people as not to be consulted, or protected from want and ignorance, was intense. He was residing

The Mask of Anarchy

LXXXII.

“ The old laws of England — they
Whose reverend heads with age are gray,
Children of a wiser day ;
And whose solemn voice must be
Thine own echo — Liberty!

LXXXIII.

“ On those who first should violate
Such sacred heralds in their state
Rest the blood that must ensue,
And it will not rest on you.

LXXXIV.

“ And if then the tyrants dare,
Let them ride among you there,
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew, —
What they like, that let them do.

LXXXV.

“ With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.

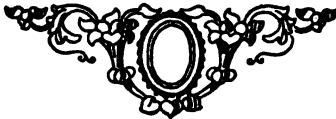
Note on The Mask of Anarchy

during the Administration which excited Shelley's abhorrence.

The poem was written for the people, and is therefore in a more popular tone than usual: portions strike as abrupt and unpolished, but many stanzas are all his own. I heard him repeat, and admired, those beginning —

“My Father Time is old and gray,”

before I knew to what poem they were to belong. But the most touching passage is that which describes the blessed effects of liberty; it might make a patriot of any man whose heart was not wholly closed against his humbler fellow creatures.



Peter Bell the Third

By Miching Mallecho, Esq.

“ Is it a party in a parlour,
Crammed just as they on earth were crammed,
Some sipping punch — some sipping tea ;
But, as you by their faces see,
All silent, and all —— damned ! ”

Peter Bell, by W. WORDSWORTH.

“ *Opbelia* — What means this, my lord ?

Hamlet — Marry, this is Miching Mallecho ; it means mischief.”

SHAKESPEARE.



Dedication

To Thomas Brown, Esq., the Younger,
H. F.

DEAR TOM:— Allow me to request you to introduce Mr. Peter Bell to the respectable family of the Fudges. Although he may fall short of those very considerable personages in the more active properties which characterize the Rat and the Apostate, I suspect that even you, their historian, will confess that he surpasses them in the more peculiarly legitimate qualification of intolerable dulness.

You know Mr. Examiner Hunt; well—it was he who presented me to two of the Mr. Bells. My intimacy with the younger Mr. Bell natu-

Dedication

rally sprung from this introduction to his brothers. And in presenting him to you, I have the satisfaction of being able to assure you that he is considerably the dullest of the three.

There is this particular advantage in an acquaintance with any one of the Peter Bells, that if you know one Peter Bell, you know three Peter Bells; they are not one, but three; not three, but one. An awful mystery, which, after having caused torrents of blood, and having been hymned by groans enough to deafen the music of the spheres, is at length illustrated to the satisfaction of all parties in the theological world, by the nature of Mr. Peter Bell.

Peter is a polyhedric Peter, or a Peter with many sides. He changes colours like a chameleon, and his coat like a snake. He is a Proteus of a Peter. He was at first sublime, pathetic, impressive, profound; then dull; then prosy and dull; and now dull — oh, so very dull! it is an ultra-legitimate dulness.

You will perceive that it is not necessary to consider Hell and the Devil as supernatural machinery. The whole scene of my epic is in “this world which is” — so Peter informed us before his conversion to *White Obi* —

Dedication

*“The world of all of us, and where
We find our happiness, or not at all.”*

Let me observe that I have spent six or seven days in composing this sublime piece; the orb of my moonlike genius has made the fourth part of its revolution round the dull earth which you inhabit, driving you mad, while it has retained its calmness and its splendour, and I have been fitting this its last phase “to occupy a permanent station in the literature of my country.”

Your works, indeed, dear Tom, sell better; but mine are far superior. The public is no judge; posterity sets all to rights.

Allow me to observe that so much has been written of Peter Bell, that the present history can be considered only, like the Iliad, as a continuation of that series of cyclic poems which have already been candidates for bestowing immortality upon, at the same time that they receive it from, his character and adventures. In this point of view I have violated no rule of syntax in beginning my composition with a conjunction; the full stop which closes the poem continued by me being, like the full

Dedication

stops at the end of the Iliad and Odyssey, a full stop of a very qualified import.

Hoping that the immortality which you have given to the Fudges, you will receive from them; and in the firm expectation that, when London shall be an habitation of bitterns; when St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey shall stand, shapeless and nameless ruins, in the midst of an unpeopled marsh; when the piers of Waterloo Bridge shall become the nuclei of islets of reeds and osiers, and cast the jagged shadows of their broken arches on the solitary stream, some transatlantic commentator will be weighing in the scales of some new and now unimagined system of criticism the respective merits of the Bells and the Fudges, and their historians, I remain, dear Tom, yours sincerely,

MICHING MALLECHO.

December 1, 1819.

P. S. — Pray excuse the date of place; so soon as the profits of the publication come in, I mean to hire lodgings in a more respectable street.



Prologue

PETER BELLS, one, two, and
three,
O'er the wide world wandering
be. —

First, the antenatal Peter,
Wrapt in weeds of the same metre,
The so long predestined raiment
Clothed in which to walk his way meant
The second Peter; whose ambition
Is to link the proposition,
As the mean of two extremes —
(This was learnt from Aldric's themes)
Shielding from the guilt of schism
The orthodoxal syllogism;

Prologue

The First Peter — he who was
Like the shadow in the glass
Of the second, yet unripe,
His substantial antitype. —
Then came Peter Bell the Second,
Who henceforward must be reckoned
The body of a double soul,
And that portion of the whole
Without which the rest would seem
Ends of a disjointed dream. —
And the Third is he who has
O'er the grave been forced to pass
To the other side, which is, —
Go and try else, — just like this.

Peter Bell the First was Peter
Smugger, milder, softer, neater,
Like the soul before it is
Born from *that* world into *this*.
The next Peter Bell was he,
Predevote, like you and me,
To good or evil as may come ;
His was the severer doom, —

Prologue

For he was an evil Cotter,
And a polygamic Potter.¹
And the last is Peter Bell,
Damned since our first parents fell,
Damned eternally to Hell—
Surely he deserves it well!

¹ The oldest scholiasts read —

A dodecagamic Potter.

This is at once more descriptive and more megalophonous, — but the alliteration of the text had captivated the vulgar ear of the herd of later commentators.







Peter Bell the Third

Part the First

Death

I.



AND Peter Bell, when he had been
With fresh-imported Hell-fire
warmed,
Grew serious—from his dress
and mien
'Twas very plainly to be seen
Peter was quite reformed.

II.

His eyes turned up, his mouth turned down ;
His accent caught a nasal twang ;

Peter Bell the Third

He oiled his hair,¹ there might be heard
The grace of God in every word
Which Peter said or sang.

III.

But Peter now grew old, and had
An ill no doctor could unravel ;
His torments almost drove him mad ; —
Some said it was a fever bad —
Some swore it was the gravel.

IV.

His holy friends then came about,
And with long preaching and persuasion,
Convinced the patient that, without
The smallest shadow of a doubt,
He was predestined to damnation.

¹ To those who have not duly appreciated the distinction between *Whale* and *Russia* oil, this attribute might rather seem to belong to the Dandy than the Evangelic. The effect, when to the windward, is indeed so similar, that it requires a subtle naturalist to discriminate the animals. They belong, however, to distinct genera.

Peter Bell the Third

v.

They said — “Thy name is Peter Bell ;
Thy skin is of a brimstone hue ;
Alive or dead — ay, sick or well —
The one God made to rhyme with hell ;
The other, I think, rhymes with you.”

vi.

Then Peter set up such a yell ! —
The nurse, who with some water gruel
Was climbing up the stairs, as well
As her old legs could climb them — fell,
And broke them both — the fall was cruel.

vii.

The Parson from the casement leapt
Into the lake of Windermere —
And many an eel — though no adept
In God's right reason for it — kept
Gnawing his kidneys half a year.

Peter Bell the Third

VIII.

And all the rest rushed through the door,
And tumbled over one another,
And broke their skulls. — Upon the floor
Meanwhile sat Peter Bell, and swore,
And cursed his father and his mother ;

IX.

And raved of God, and sin, and death,
Blaspheming like an infidel ;
And said, that with his clenched teeth,
He'd seize the earth from underneath,
And drag it with him down to hell.

X.

As he was speaking came a spasm,
And wrenched his gnashing teeth asunder ;
Like one who sees a strange phantasm
He lay, — there was a silent chasm
Between his upper jaw and under.

Peter Bell the Third

XI.

And yellow death lay on his face ;
And a fixed smile that was not human
Told, as I understand the case,
That he was gone to the wrong place :—
I heard all this from the old woman.

XII.

Then there came down from Langdale Pike
A cloud, with lightning, wind, and hail ;
It swept over the mountains like
An ocean,— and I heard it strike
The woods and crags of Grasmere vale.

XIII.

And I saw the black storm come
Nearer, minute after minute ;
Its thunder made the cataracts dumb ;
With hiss, and clash, and hollow hum,
It neared as if the Devil was in it.

Peter Bell the Third

XIV.

The Devil *was* in it:— he had bought
Peter for half-a-crown ; and when
The storm which bore him vanished, nought
That in the house that storm had caught
Was ever seen again.

XV.

The gaping neighbours came next day —
They found all vanished from the shore :
The Bible, whence he used to pray,
Half scorched under a hen-coop lay ;
Smashed glass — and nothing more !





Part the Second

The Devil

I.



HE Devil, I safely can aver,
Has neither hoof, nor tail, nor
sting;
Nor is he, as some sages swear,
A spirit, neither here nor there,
In nothing — yet in everything.

II.

He is — what we are ; for sometimes
The Devil is a gentleman ;
At others a bard bartering rhymes
For sack ; a statesman spinning crimes ;
A swindler, living as he can ;

Peter Bell the Third

III.

A thief, who cometh in the night,
With whole boots and net pantaloons,
Like some one whom it were not right
To mention ; — or the luckless wight
From whom he steals nine silver spoons.

IV.

But in this case he did appear
Like a slop-merchant from Wapping,
And with smug face, and eye severe,
On every side did perk and peer
Till he saw Peter dead or napping.

V.

He had on an upper Benjamin
(For he was of the driving schism)
In the which he wrapt his skin
From the storm he travelled in,
For fear of rheumatism.

Peter Bell the Third

VI.

He called the ghost out of the corse ;—
It was exceedingly like Peter, —
Only its voice was hollow and hoarse —
It had a queerish look of course —
Its dress too was a little neater.

VII.

The Devil knew not his name and lot ;
Peter knew not that he was Bell :
Each had an upper stream of thought,
Which made all seem as it was not ;
Fitting itself to all things well.

VIII.

Peter thought he had parents dear,
Brothers, sisters, cousins, cronies,
In the fens of Lincolnshire ;
He perhaps had found them there
Had he gone and boldly shown his

Peter Bell the Third

IX.

Solemn phiz in his own village ;
Where he thought oft when a boy
He'd clomb the orchard walls to pillage
The produce of his neighbour's tillage,
With marvellous pride and joy.

X.

And the Devil thought he had,
'Mid the misery and confusion
Of an unjust war, just made
A fortune by the gainful trade
Of giving soldiers rations bad —
The world is full of strange delusion.

XI.

That he had a mansion planned
In a square like Grosvenor Square,
That he was aping fashion, and
That he now came to Westmoreland
To see what was romantic there.

Peter Bell the Third

XII.

And all this, though quite ideal, —
Ready at a breath to vanish, —
Was a state not more unreal
Than the peace he could not feel,
Or the care he could not banish.

XIII.

After a little conversation,
The Devil told Peter, if he chose,
He'd bring him to the world of fashion
By giving him a situation
In his own service — and new clothes.

XIV.

And Peter bowed, quite pleased and proud,
And after waiting some few days
For a new livery — dirty yellow
Turned up with black — the wretched fellow
Was bowled to Hell in the Devil's chaise.



Part the Third

Hell

I.



HELL is a city much like London —
A populous and a smoky city ;
There are all sorts of people un-
done,

And there is little or no fun done ;

Small justice shown, and still less pity.

II.

There is a Castles, and a Canning,

A Cobbett, and a Castlereagh ;

All sorts of caitiff corpses planning

All sorts of cozening for trepanning

Corpses less corrupt than they.

Peter Bell the Third

III.

There is a — who has lost
His wits, or sold them, none knows which ;
He walks about a double ghost,
And though as thin as Fraud almost —
Ever grows more grim and rich.

IV.

There is a Chancery Court ; a King ;
A manufacturing mob ; a set
Of thieves who by themselves are sent
Similar thieves to represent ;
An army ; and a public debt.

V.

Which last is a scheme of paper money,
And means — being interpreted —
“ Bees, keep your wax — give us the honey,
And we will plant, while skies are sunny,
Flowers, which in winter serve instead.”

Peter Bell the Third

VI.

There is a great talk of revolution —
And a great chance of despotism —
German soldiers — camps — confusion —
Tumults — lotteries — rage — delusion —
Gin — suicide — and methodism.

VII.

Taxes too, on wine and bread,
And meat, and beer, and tea, and cheese,
From which those patriots pure are fed,
Who gorge before they reel to bed
The tenfold essence of all these.

VIII.

There are mincing women, mewing,
(Like cats, who *amant miserè*,¹)

¹ One of the attributes in Linnæus's description of the Cat. To a similar cause the caterwauling of more than one species of this genus is to be referred;—except, indeed, that the poor quadruped is compelled to quarrel with its own pleasures, whilst the biped is supposed only to quarrel with those of others.

Peter Bell the Third

Of their own virtue, and pursuing
Their gentler sisters to that ruin
Without which — what were chastity? ¹

IX.

Lawyers — judges — old hobnobbers
Are there — bailiffs — chancellors —
Bishops — great and little robbers —
Rhymesters — pamphleteers — stock-jobbers —
Men of glory in the wars, —

X.

Things whose trade is, over ladies
To lean, and flirt, and stare, and simper,
Till all that is divine in woman
Grows cruel, courteous, smooth, inhuman,
Crucified 'twixt a smile and whimper.

¹ What would this husk and excuse for a virtue be without its kernel prostitution, or the kernel prostitution without this husk of a virtue? I wonder the women of the town do not form an association, like the Society for the Suppression of Vice, for the support of what may be called the "King, Church, and Constitution" of their order. But this subject is almost too horrible for a joke.

Peter Bell the Third

XI.

Thrusting, toiling, wailing, moiling,
Frowning, preaching — such a riot !
Each with never-ceasing labour,
Whilst he thinks he cheats his neighbour,
Cheating his own heart of quiet.

XII.

And all these meet at levees ; —
Dinners convivial and political ; —
Suppers of epic poets ; — teas,
Where small talk dies in agonies ; —
Breakfasts professional and critical ;

XIII.

Lunches and snacks so aldermanic
That one would furnish forth ten dinners,
Where reigns a Cretan-tonguèd panic,
Lest news Russ, Dutch, or Alemannic
Should make some losers, and some winners ; —

Peter Bell the Third

XIV.

At conversazioni — balls —
Conventicles — and drawing-rooms —
Courts of law — committees — calls
Of a morning — clubs — book-stalls —
Churches — masquerades — and tombs.

XV.

And this is Hell — and in this smother
All are damnable and damned ;
Each one damning, damns the other ;
They are damned by one another,
By none other are they damned.

XVI.

'Tis a lie to say, " God damns ! " ¹
Where was Heaven's Attorney-General
When they first gave out such flams ?
Let there be an end of shams,
They are mines of poisonous mineral.

¹ This libel on our national oath, and this accusation of all our countrymen of being in the daily practice of solemnly asseverating the most enormous falsehood, I fear deserves the notice of a more active Attorney-General than that here alluded to.

Peter Bell the Third

XVII.

Statesmen damn themselves to be
Cursed ; and lawyers damn their souls
To the auction of a fee ;
Churchmen damn themselves to see
God's sweet love in burning coals.

XVIII.

The rich are damned, beyond all cure,
To taunt, and starve, and trample on
The weak and wretched ; and the poor
Damn their broken hearts to endure
Stripe on stripe, with groan on groan.

XIX.

Sometimes the poor are damned indeed
To take, — not means for being blest, —
But Cobbett's snuff, revenge ; that weed
From which the worms that it doth feed
Squeeze less than they before possessed.

Peter Bell the Third

xx.

And some few, like we know who,
 Damned — but God alone knows why —
To believe their minds are given
To make this ugly Hell a Heaven ;
 In which faith they live and die.

xxi.

Thus, as in a town, plague-stricken,
 Each man be he sound or no
Must indifferently sicken ;
As when day begins to thicken,
 None knows a pigeon from a crow, —

xxii.

So good and bad, sane and mad,
 The oppressor and the oppressed ;
Those who weep to see what others
Smile to inflict upon their brothers ;
 Lovers, haters, worst and best ;

Peter Bell the Third

XXIII.

All are damned — they breathe an air,
Thick, infected, joy-dispelling :
Each pursues what seems most fair,
Mining like moles, through mind, and there
Scoop palace-caverns vast, where Care
In thronèd state is ever dwelling.





Part the Fourth

Sin

I.



O, Peter in Hell's Grosvenor
Square,
A footman in the Devil's
service!

And the misjudging world would swear
That every man in service there
To virtue would prefer vice.

II.

But Peter, though now damned, was not
What Peter was before damnation.
Men oftentimes prepare a lot
Which, ere it finds them, is not what
Suits with their genuine station.

Peter Bell the Third

III.

All things that Peter saw and felt
Had a peculiar aspect to him ;
And when they came within the belt
Of his own nature, seemed to melt,
Like cloud to cloud, into him.

IV.

And so the outward world uniting
To that within him, he became
Considerably uninviting
To those, who meditation slighting,
Were moulded in a different frame.

V.

And he scorned them, and they scorned him ;
And he scorned all they did ; and they
Did all that men of their own trim
Are wont to do to please their whim,
Drinking, lying, swearing, play.

Peter Bell the Third

VI.

Such were his fellow servants ; thus
His virtue, like our own, was built
Too much on that indignant fuss
Hypocrite Pride stirs up in us
To bully one another's guilt.

VII.

He had a mind which was somehow
At once circumference and centre
Of all he might or feel or know ;
Nothing went ever out, although
Something did ever enter.

VIII.

He had as much imagination
As a pint-pot ; — he never could
Fancy another situation,
From which to dart his contemplation,
Than that wherein he stood.

Peter Bell the Third

IX.

Yet his was individual mind,
And new created all he saw
In a new manner, and refined
Those new creations, and combined
Them, by a master-spirit's law.

X.

Thus — though unimaginative —
An apprehension clear, intense,
Of his mind's work, had made alive
The things it wrought on ; I believe
Wakening a sort of thought in sense.

XI.

But from the first 'twas Peter's drift
To be a kind of moral eunuch,
He touched the hem of Nature's shift,
Felt faint — and never dared uplift
The closest, all-concealing tunic.

Peter Bell the Third

XII.

She laughed the while, with an arch smile
And kissed him with a sister's kiss,
And said — " My best Diogenes,
I love you well — but, if you please,
Tempt not again my deepest bliss.

XIII.

" 'Tis you are cold — for I, not coy,
Yield love for love, frank, warm, and true ;
And Burns, a Scottish peasant boy —
His errors prove it — knew my joy
More, learnèd friend, than you.

XIV.

*" Bocca bacciata non perde ventura
Anzi rinnuova come fa la luna : —*
So thought Boccaccio, whose sweet words might
cure a
Male prude, like you, from what you now
endure, a
Low-tide in soul, like a stagnant laguna."

Peter Bell the Third

xv.

Then Peter rubbed his eyes severe,
And smoothed his spacious forehead down
With his broad palm ; — 'twixt love and fear,
He looked, as he no doubt felt, queer,
And in his dream sate down.

xvi.

The Devil was no uncommon creature ;
A leaden-witted thief — just huddled
Out of the dross and scum of nature ;
A toad-like lump of limb and feature,
With mind, and heart, and fancy muddled.

xvii.

He was that heavy, dull, cold thing,
The spirit of evil well may be :
A drone too base to have a sting ;
Who gluts, and grimes his lazy wing,
And calls lust, luxury.

Peter Bell the Third

XVIII.

Now he was quite the kind of wight
Round whom collect, at a fixed æra,
Venison, turtle, hock, and claret,—
Good cheer—and those who come to share
it—
And best East Indian madeira !

XIX.

It was his fancy to invite
Men of science, wit, and learning,
Who came to lend each other light ;
He proudly thought that his gold's might
Had set those spirits burning.

XX.

And men of learning, science, wit,
Considered him as you and I
Think of some rotten tree, and sit
Lounging and dining under it,
Exposed to the wide sky.

Peter Bell the Third

XXI.

And all the while, with loose fat smile,
The willing wretch sat winking there,
Believing 'twas his power that made
That jovial scene — and that all paid
Homage to his unnoticed chair.

XXII.

Though to be sure this place was Hell;
He was the Devil — and all they —
What though the claret circled well,
And wit, like ocean, rose and fell? —
Were damned eternally.





Part the Fifth

Grace

I.



AMONG the guests who often staid
Till the Devil's petits-soupers,
A man there came, fair as a
maid,
And Peter noted what he said,
Standing behind his master's chair.

II.

He was a mighty poet — and
A subtle-souled psychologist ;
All things he seemed to understand,
Of old or new — of sea or land —
But his own mind — which was a mist.

Peter Bell the Third

III.

This was a man who might have turned
Hell into Heaven — and so in gladness
A Heaven unto himself have earned ;
But he in shadows undiscerned
Trusted, — and damned himself to madness.

IV.

He spoke of poetry, and how
“ Divine it was — a light — a love —
A spirit which like wind doth blow
As it listeth, to and fro ;
A dew rained down from God above.

V.

“ A power which comes and goes like dream,
And which none can ever trace —
Heaven’s light on earth — Truth’s brightest
beam.”
And when he ceased there lay the gleam
Of those words upon his face.

Peter Bell the Third

VI.

Now Peter, when he heard such talk,
Would, heedless of a broken pate,
Stand like a man asleep, or baulk
Some wishing guest of knife or fork
Or drop and break his master's plate.

VII.

At night he oft would start and wake
Like a lover, and began
In a wild measure songs to make
On moor, and glen, and rocky lake,
And on the heart of man —

VIII.

And on the universal sky —
And the wide earth's bosom green, —
And the sweet, strange mystery
Of what beyond these things may lie,
And yet remain unseen.

Peter Bell the Third

IX.

For in his thought he visited
The spots in which, ere dead and damned,
He his wayward life had led ;
Yet knew not whence the thoughts were fed,
Which thus his fancy crammed.

X.

And these obscure remembrances
Stirred such harmony in Peter,
That whensoever he should please,
He could speak of rocks and trees
In poetic metre.

XI.

For though it was without a sense
Of memory, yet he remembered well
Many a ditch and quick-set fence ;
Of lakes he had intelligence,
He knew something of heath and fell.

Peter Bell the Third

XII.

He had also dim recollections
Of pedlars tramping on their rounds ;
Milk-pans and pails ; and odd collections
Of saws, and proverbs ; and reflections
Old parsons make in burying-grounds.

XIII.

But Peter's verse was clear, and came
Announcing from the frozen hearth
Of a cold age, that none might tame
The soul of that diviner flame
It augured to the Earth.

XIV.

Like gentle rains, on the dry plains,
Making that green which late was gray,
Or like the sudden moon, that stains
Some gloomy chamber's window-panes
With a broad light like day.

Peter Bell the Third

xv.

For language was in Peter's hand
Like clay, while he was yet a potter ;
And he made songs for all the land,
Sweet both to feel and understand,
As pipkins late to mountain Cotter.

xvi.

And Mr. —, the bookseller,
Gave twenty pounds for some ; — then
scorning
A footman's yellow coat to wear,
Peter, too proud of heart, I fear,
Instantly gave the Devil warning.

xvii.

Whereat the Devil took offence,
And swore in his soul a great oath then,
“ That for his damned impertinence,
He'd bring him to a proper sense
Of what was due to gentlemen ! ” —



Part the Sixth

Damnation

I.



THAT mine enemy had written
A book! — cried Job: — a
fearful curse;
If to the Arab, as the Briton,
'Twas galling to be critic-bitten: —
The Devil to Peter wished no worse.

II.

When Peter's next new book found vent,
The Devil to all the first Reviews
A copy of it slyly sent,
With five-pound note as compliment,
And this short notice — "Pray abuse."

Peter Bell the Third

III.

Then *seriatim*, month and quarter,
 Appeared such mad tirades. — One said —
“ Peter seduced Mrs. Foy’s daughter,
Then drowned the mother in Ullswater,
 The last thing as he went to bed.”

IV.

Another — “ Let him shave his head !
 Where’s Doctor Willis ? — Or is he joking ?
What does the rascal mean or hope,
No longer imitating Pope,
 In that barbarian Shakespeare poking ? ”

V.

Once more, “ Is incest not enough ?
 And must there be adultery too ?
Grace after meat ? Miscreant and Liar !
Thief ! Blackguard ! Scoundrel ! Fool ! Hell-
 fire
 Is twenty times too good for you.

Peter Bell the Third

VI.

“By that last book of yours we think
You’ve double damned yourself to scorn ;
We warned you whilst yet on the brink
You stood. From your black name will shrink
The babe that is unborn.”

VII.

All these Reviews the Devil made
Up in a parcel, which he had
Safely to Peter’s house conveyed.
For carriage, tenpence Peter paid —
Untied them — read them — went half mad.

VIII.

“What!” cried he, “this is my reward
For nights of thought, and days of toil?
Do poets, but to be abhorred
By men of whom they never heard,
Consume their spirits’ oil?”

Peter Bell the Third

IX.

“What have I done to them? — and who
Is Mrs. Foy? ’Tis very cruel
To speak of me and Betty so!
Adultery! God defend me! Oh!
I’ve half a mind to fight a duel.

X.

“Or,” cried he, a grave look collecting,
“Is it my genius, like the moon,
Sets those who stand her face inspecting,
That face within their brain reflecting,
Like a crazed bell-chime, out of tune?”

XI.

For Peter did not know the town,
But thought, as country readers do,
For half a guinea or a crown,
He bought oblivion or renown
From God’s own voice¹ in a review.

¹ *Vox populi, vox dei.* As Mr. Godwin truly observes of a more famous saying, *of some merit as a popular maxim, but totally destitute of philosophical accuracy.*

Peter Bell the Third

XII.

All Peter did on this occasion
Was, writing some sad stuff in prose.
It is a dangerous invasion
When poets criticize : their station
Is to delight, not pose.

XIII.

The Devil then sent to Leipsic fair
For Born's translation of Kant's book ;
A world of words, tail foremost, where
Right — wrong — false — true — and foul —
and fair,
As in a lottery-wheel are shook.

XIV.

Five thousand crammed octavo pages
Of German psychologies, — he
Who his *furor verborum* assuages
Thereon deserves just seven months' wages
More than will e'er be due to me.

Peter Bell the Third

XV.

I looked on them nine several days,
And then I saw that they were bad ;
A friend, too, spoke in their dispraise, —
He never read them ; — with amaze
I found Sir William Drummond had.

XVI.

When the book came, the Devil sent
It to P. Verbovale,¹ Esquire,
With a brief note of compliment,
By that night's Carlisle mail. It went,
And set his soul on fire.

XVII.

Fire which, *ex luce præbens fumum*,
Made him beyond the bottom see

¹ *Quasi, qui valet verba* : — *i. e.* all the words which have been, are, or may be expended by, for, against, with, or on him. A sufficient proof of the utility of this history. Peter's progenitor who selected this name seems to have possessed a *pure anticipated cognition* of the nature and modesty of this ornament of his posterity.

Peter Bell the Third

Of truth's clear well — when I and you,
Ma'am,
Go, as we shall do, *subter bumum*,
We may know more than he.

XVIII.

Now Peter ran to seed in soul
Into a walking paradox ;
For he was neither part nor whole,
Nor good, nor bad — nor knave nor fool,
— Among the woods and rocks.

XIX.

Furious he rode, where late he ran,
Lashing and spurring his tame hobby ;
Turned to a formal puritan,
A solemn and unsexual man, —
He half believed *White Obi*.

XX.

This steed in vision he would ride,
High trotting over nine-inch bridges,
With Flibbertigibbet, imp of pride,

Peter Bell the Third

Mocking and mowing by his side —
A mad-brained goblin for a guide —
Over corn-fields, gates, and hedges.

XXI.

After these ghastly rides, he came
Home to his heart, and found from thence
Much stolen of its accustomed flame ;
His thoughts grew weak, drowsy, and lame
Of their intelligence.

XXII.

To Peter's view, all seemed one hue ;
He was no whig, he was no tory ;
No Deist and no Christian he ; —
He got so subtle, that to be
Nothing was all his glory.

XXIII.

One single point in his belief
From his organization sprung,
The heart-enrooted faith, the chief

Peter Bell the Third

Ear in his doctrines' blighted sheaf,
That "happiness is wrong;"

XXIV.

So thought Calvin and Dominic;
So think their fierce successors, who
Even now would neither stint nor stick
Our flesh from off our bones to pick,
If they might "do their do."

XXV.

His morals thus were undermined:—
The old Peter—the hard, old Potter—
Was born anew within his mind;
He grew dull, harsh, sly, unrefined,
As when he tramped beside the Otter.¹

XXVI.

In the death hues of agony
Lambently flashing from a fish,
Now Peter felt amused to see

¹ A famous river in the new Atlantis of the Dynastophylic Pantisocratista.

Peter Bell the Third

Shades like a rainbow's rise and flee,
Mixed with a certain hungry wish.¹

XXVII.

So in his Country's dying face
He looked — and lovely as she lay,
Seeking in vain his last embrace,
Wailing her own abandoned case,
With hardened sneer he turned away :

XXVIII.

And coolly to his own soul said ; —
“ Do you not think that we might make
A poem on her when she's dead : —

¹ See the description of the beautiful colours produced during the agonizing death of a number of trout, in the fourth part of a long poem in blank verse, published within a few years. That poem contains curious evidence of the gradual hardening of a strong but circumscribed sensibility, of the perversion of a penetrating but panic-stricken understanding. The author might have derived a lesson which he had probably forgotten from these sweet and sublime verses.

“ This lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,
Taught both by what she¹ shows and what conceals,
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.”

¹ Nature.

Peter Bell the Third

Or, no — a thought is in my head —
Her shroud for a new sheet I'll take.

XXIX.

“ My wife wants one. — Let who will bury
This mangled corpse ! And I and you,
My dearest Soul, will then make merry,
As the Prince Regent did with Sherry, —
Ay — and at last desert me too.”

XXX.

And so his Soul would not be gay,
But moaned within him ; like a fawn
Moaning within a cave, it lay
Wounded and wasting, day by day,
Till all its life of life was gone.

XXXI.

As troubled skies stain waters clear,
The storm in Peter's heart and mind
Now made his verses dark and queer :
They were the ghosts of what they were,
Shaking dim grave-clothes in the wind.

Peter Bell the Third

XXXII.

For he now raved enormous folly,
Of Baptisms, Sunday schools, and Graves,
'Twould make George Colman melancholy,
To have heard him, like a male Molly,
Chaunting those stupid staves.

XXXIII.

Yet the Reviews, who heaped abuse
On Peter while he wrote for freedom,
So soon as in his song they spy
The folly which soothes tyranny,
Praise him, for those who feed 'em.

XXXIV.

“ He was a man, too great to scan ; —
A planet lost in truth's keen rays : —
His virtue, awful and prodigious ; —
He was the most sublime, religious,
Pure-minded Poet of these days.”

Peter Bell the Third

xxxv.

As soon as he read that, cried Peter,
“ Eureka ! I have found the way
To make a better thing of metre
Than e'er was made by living creature
Up to this blessed day.”

xxxvi.

Then Peter wrote odes to the Devil ; —
In one of which he meekly said :
“ May Carnage and Slaughter,
Thy niece and thy daughter,
May Rapine and Famine,
Thy gorge ever cramming,
Glut thee with living and dead !

xxxvii.

“ May death and damnation,
And consternation,
Flit up from hell with pure intent !
Slash them at Manchester,

Peter Bell the Third

Glasgow, Leeds, and Chester ;
Drench all with blood from Avon to Trent.

XXXVIII.

“ Let thy body-guard yeomen
Hew down babes and women,
And laugh with bold triumph till Heaven be
rent.

When Moloch in Jewry
Munched children with fury,
It was thou, Devil, dining with pure intent.”¹

¹ It is curious to observe how often extremes meet. Cobbett and Peter use the same language for a different purpose: Peter is indeed a sort of metrical Cobbett. Cobbett is, however, more mischievous than Peter, because he pollutes a holy and now unconquerable cause with the principles of legitimate murder; whilst the other only makes a bad one ridiculous and odious.

If either Peter or Cobbett should see this note, each will feel more indignation at being compared to the other than at any censure implied in the moral perversion laid to their charge.





Part the Seventh

Double Damnation

I.



HE Devil now knew his proper
cue. —

Soon as he read the ode, he
drove

To his friend Lord MacMurderchouse's,
A man of interest in both houses,
And said : — “ For money or for love,

II.

“ Pray find some cure or sinecure ;
To feed from the superfluous taxes
A friend of ours — a poet — fewer
Have fluttered tamer to the lure
Than he.” His lordship stands and racks his

Peter Bell the Third

III.

Stupid brains, while one might count
As many beads as he had boroughs, —
At length replies ; from his mean front,
Like one who rubs out an account,
Smoothing away the unmeaning furrows :

IV.

“ It happens fortunately, dear Sir,
I can. I hope I need require
No pledge from you, that he will stir
In our affairs ;— like Oliver,
That he'll be worthy of his hire.”

V.

These words exchanged, the news sent off
To Peter, home the Devil hied, —
Took to his bed ; he had no cough,
No doctor, — meat and drink enough, —
Yet that same night he died.

Peter Bell the Third

VI.

The Devil's corpse was leaded down ;
His decent heirs enjoyed his pelf,
Mourning-coaches, many a one,
Followed his hearse along the town :—
Where was the devil himself?

VII.

When Peter heard of his promotion,
His eyes grew like two stars for bliss :
There was a bow of sleek devotion
Engendering in his back ; each motion
Seemed a Lord's shoe to kiss.

VIII.

He hired a house, bought plate, and made
A genteel drive up to his door,
With sifted gravel neatly laid, —
As if defying all who said,
Peter was ever poor.

Peter Bell the Third

IX.

But a disease soon struck into
The very life and soul of Peter —
He walked about — slept — had the hue
Of health upon his cheeks — and few
Dug better — none a heartier eater.

X.

And yet a strange and horrid curse
Clung upon Peter, night and day,
Month after month the thing grew worse,
And deadlier than in this my verse
I can find strength to say.

XI.

Peter was dull — he was at first
Dull — oh, so dull — so very dull !
Whether he talked, wrote, or rehearsed —
Still with this dulness was he cursed —
Dull — beyond all conception — dull.

Peter Bell the Third

XII.

No one could read his books — no mortal,
But a few natural friends, would hear him ;
The parson came not near his portal ;
His state was like that of the immortal
Described by Swift — no man could bear
him.

XIII.

His sister, wife, and children yawned,
With a long, slow, and drear ennui,
All human patience far beyond ;
Their hopes of Heaven each would have
pawned,
Anywhere else to be.

XIV.

But in his verse, and in his prose,
The essence of his dulness was
Concentrated and compressed so close,
'Twould have made Guatimozin doze
On his red gridiron of brass.

Peter Bell the Third

XV.

A printer's boy, folding those pages,
Fell slumbrously upon one side ;
Like those famed seven who slept three ages—
To wakeful frenzy's vigil rages,
As opiates, were the same applied.

XVI.

Even the Reviewers who were hired
To do the work of his reviewing,
With adamantine nerves, grew tired ;—
Gaping and torpid they retired,
To dream of what they should be doing.

XVII.

And worse and worse, the drowsy curse
Yawned in him, till it grew a pest—
A wide contagious atmosphere,
Creeping like cold through all things near ;
A power to infect and to infest.

Peter Bell the Third

XVIII.

His servant-maids and dogs grew dull ;
His kitten late a sportive elf,
The woods and lakes, so beautiful,
Of dim stupidity were full,
All grew dull as Peter's self.

XIX.

The earth under his feet — the springs,
Which lived within it a quick life,
The air, the winds of many wings,
That fan it with new murmurings,
Were dead to their harmonious strife.

XX.

The birds and beasts within the wood,
The insects, and each creeping thing,
Were now a silent multitude ;
Love's work was left unwrought — no brood
Near Peter's house took wing.

Peter Bell the Third

XXI.

And every neighbouring cottager
Stupidly yawned upon the other :
No jackass brayed ; no little cur
Cocked up his ears ; — no man would stir
To save a dying mother.

XXII.

Yet all from that charmed district went
But some half-idiot and half-knave,
Who rather than pay any rent
Would live with marvellous content
Over his father's grave.

XXIII.

No bailiff dared within that space,
For fear of the dull charm, to enter ;
A man would bear upon his face,
For fifteen months in any case,
The yawn of such a venture.

Peter Bell the Third

xxiv.

Seven miles above — below — around —

This pest of dulness holds its sway ;
A ghastly life without a sound ;
To Peter's soul the spell is bound —
How should it ever pass away ?





Note on Peter Bell the Third, by Mrs. Shelley



IN this new edition I have added "Peter Bell the Third." A critique on Wordsworth's "Peter Bell" reached us at Leghorn, which amused Shelley exceedingly, and suggested this poem.

I need scarcely observe that nothing personal to the author of "Peter Bell" is intended in this poem. No man ever admired Wordsworth's poetry more;—he read it perpetually, and taught others to appreciate its beauties. This poem is, like all others written by Shelley, ideal. He conceived the idealism of a poet—a man of lofty and creative genius—quitting the glorious calling of discovering

Note on Peter Bell the Third

and announcing the beautiful and good, to support and propagate ignorant prejudices and pernicious errors; imparting to the unenlightened, not that ardour for truth and spirit of toleration which Shelley looked on as the sources of the moral improvement and happiness of mankind, but false and injurious opinions, that evil was good, and that ignorance and force were the best allies of purity and virtue. His idea was that a man gifted, even as transcendently as the author of "Peter Bell," with the highest qualities of genius, must, if he fostered such errors, be infected with dulness. This poem was written as a warning — not as a narration of the reality. He was unacquainted personally with Wordsworth, or with Coleridge (to whom he alludes in the fifth part of the poem), and therefore, I repeat, his poem is purely ideal; — it contains something of criticism on the compositions of those great poets, but nothing injurious to the men themselves.

No poem contains more of Shelley's peculiar views with regard to the errors into which many of the wisest have fallen, and the pernicious effects of certain opinions on society.

NOTE IN FEAR BELL the Third

MUCH if it is beautifully written: and, though, like the grotesque drama of "Swellfoot," it must be looked on as a plaything, it has so much heart and poetry—so much of *himself* in it—that I cannot fail to interest greatly, and its right belongs to the world for whose instruction and benefit it was written.



Letter to Maria Gisborne

Note on Peter Bell the Third

Much of it is beautifully written : and, though, like the burlesque drama of "Swellfoot," it must be looked on as a plaything, it has so much merit and poetry—so much of *himself* in it—that it cannot fail to interest greatly, and by right belongs to the world for whose instruction and benefit it was written.



Letter to Maria Gisborne





Letter to Maria Gisborne



LEGHORN, *July 1, 1820.*



HE spider spreads her webs,
whether she be
In poet's tower, cellar, or barn, or
tree ;

The silkworm in the dark green mulberry
leaves

His winding sheet and cradle ever weaves ;
So I, a thing whom moralists call worm,
Sit spinning still round this decaying form,
From the fine threads of rare and subtle
thought —

No net of words in garish colours wrought

Letter to Maria Gisborne

To catch the idle buzzers of the day —
But a soft cell, where when that fades away,
Memory may clothe in wings my living name
And feed it with the asphodels of fame,
Which in those hearts which must remember
me
Grow, making love an immortality.

Whoever should behold me now, I wist,
Would think I were a mighty mechanist,
Bent with sublime Archimedean art
To breathe a soul into the iron heart
Of some machine portentous, or strange gin,
Which by the force of figured spells might win
Its way over the sea, and sport therein ;
For round the walls are hung dread engines,
such
As Vulcan never wrought for Jove to clutch
Ixion or the Titan : — or the quick
Wit of that man of God, St. Dominic,
To convince Atheist, Turk, or Heretic,
Or those in philanthropic council met,
Who thought to pay some interest for the debt

Letter to Maria Gisborne

They owed to Jesus Christ for their salvation,
By giving a faint foretaste of damnation
To Shakespeare, Sidney, Spenser, and the
rest

Who made our land an island of the blest,
When lamp-like Spain, who now relumes her
fire

On Freedom's hearth, grew dim with Em-
pire:—

With thumbscrews, wheels, with tooth and
spike and jag,

Which fishers found under the utmost crag
Of Cornwall and the storm-encompassed isles,
Where to the sky the rude sea rarely smiles
Unless in treacherous wrath, as on the morn
When the exulting elements in scorn
Satiated with destroyed destruction, lay
Sleeping in beauty on their mangled prey,
As panthers sleep;—and other strange and
dread

Magical forms the brick floor overspread,—
Proteus transformed to metal did not make
More figures, or more strange; nor did he take

Letter to Maria Gisborne

Such shapes of unintelligible brass,
Or heap himself in such a horrid mass
Of tin and iron not to be understood ;
And forms of unimaginable wood,
To puzzle Tubal Cain and all his brood :
Great screws, and cones, and wheels, and
 groovèd blocks,
The elements of what will stand the shocks
Of wave and wind and time. — Upon the table
More knacks and quips there be than I am able
To catalogize in this verse of mine : —
A pretty bowl of wood — not full of wine,
But quicksilver ; that dew which the gnomes
 drink
When at their subterranean toil they swink,
Pledging the demons of the earthquake, who
Reply to them in lava — cry halloo !
And call out to the cities o'er their head, —
Roofs, towers, and shrines, the dying and the
 dead,
Crash through the chinks of earth — and then
 all quaff
Another rouse, and hold their sides and laugh.

Letter to Maria Gisborne

This quicksilver no gnome has drunk — within
The walnut bowl it lies, veinèd and thin,
In colour like the wake of light that stains
The Tuscan deep, when from the moist moon
rains

The inmost shower of its white fire — the
breeze

Is still — blue heaven smiles over the pale
seas.

And in this bowl of quicksilver — for I
Yield to the impulse of an infancy
Outlasting manhood — I have made to float
A rude idealism of a paper boat : —
A hollow screw with cogs — Henry will know
The thing I mean and laugh at me, — if so
He fears not I should do more mischief. —

Next

Lie bills and calculations much perplext,
With steamboats, frigates, and machinery
quaint

Traced over them in blue and yellow paint.
Then comes a range of mathematical
Instruments, for plans nautical and statical ;

Letter to Maria Gisborne

A heap of rosin, a queer broken glass
With ink in it; — a china cup that was
What it will never be again, I think,
A thing from which sweet lips were wont to
drink

The liquor doctors rail at — and which I
Will quaff in spite of them — and when we die
We'll toss up who died first of drinking tea,
And cry out, — heads or tails? where'er we be.
Near that a dusty paint-box, some odd hooks,
A half-burnt match, an ivory block, three books,
Where conic sections, spherics, logarithms,
To great Laplace, from Saunderson and Sims,
Lie heaped in their harmonious disarray
Of figures, — disentangle them who may.
Baron de Tott's Memoirs beside them lie,
And some odd volumes of old chemistry.
Near those a most inexplicable thing,
With lead in the middle — I'm conjecturing
How to make Henry understand; but no —
I'll leave, as Spenser says, with many mo,
This secret in the pregnant womb of time,
Too vast a matter for so weak a rhyme.

Letter to Maria Gisborne

And here like some weird Archimage sit I,
Plotting dark spells, and devilish enginery,
The self-impelling steam-wheels of the mind
Which pump up oaths from clergymen, and
grind

The gentle spirit of our meek reviews
Into a powdery foam of salt abuse,
Ruffing the ocean of their self-content ;—
I sit — and smile or sigh as is my bent,
But not for them — Libeccio rushes round
With an inconstant and an idle sound,
I heed him more than them — the thunder-
smoke

Is gathering on the mountains, like a cloak
Folded athwart their shoulders broad and
bare ;

The ripe corn under the undulating air
Undulates like an ocean ;— and the vines
Are trembling wide in all their trellised lines —
The murmur of the awakening sea doth fill
The empty pauses of the blast ;— the hill
Looks hoary through the white electric rain,
And from the glens beyond, in sullen strain,

Letter to Maria Gisborne

The interrupted thunder howls ; above
One chasm of heaven smiles, like the eye of
Love
On the unquiet world ; — while such things
are,
How could one worth your friendship heed
the war
Of worms ? the shriek of the world's carrion
jays,
Their censure, or their wonder, or their praise ?

You are not here ! the quaint witch Memory
sees
In vacant chairs your absent images,
And points where once you sat, and now
should be
But are not. — I demand if ever we
Shall meet as then we met ; — and she replies,
Veiling in awe her second-sighted eyes :
“ I know the past alone — but summon home
My sister Hope, — she speaks of all to come.”
But I, an old diviner, who knew well
Every false verse of that sweet oracle,

Letter to Maria Gisborne

Turned to the sad enchantress once again,
And sought a respite from my gentle pain,
In citing every passage o'er and o'er
Of our communion — how on the seashore
We watched the ocean and the sky together,
Under the roof of blue Italian weather ;
How I ran home through last year's thunder-
storm,
And felt the transverse lightning linger warm
Upon my cheek — and how we often made
Feasts for each other, where good-will out-
weighed
The frugal luxury of our country cheer,
As well it might, were it less firm and clear
Than ours must ever be ; — and how we spun
A shroud of talk to hide us from the sun
Of this familiar life, which seems to be
But is not, — or is but quaint mockery
Of all we would believe, and sadly blame
The jarring and inexplicable frame
Of this wrong world : — and then anatomize
The purposes and thoughts of men whose
eyes

Letter to Maria Gisborne

Were closed in distant years ; — or widely guess
The issue of the earth's great business,
When we shall be as we no longer are —
Like babbling gossips safe, who hear the war
Of winds, and sigh, but tremble not ; — or how
You listened to some interrupted flow
Of visionary rhyme, — in joy and pain
Struck from the inmost fountains of my brain,
With little skill perhaps ; — or how we sought
Those deepest wells of passion or of thought
Wrought by wise poets in the waste of years,
Staining their sacred waters with our tears ;
Quenching a thirst ever to be renewed !
Or how I, wisest lady ! then indued
The language of a land which now is free,
And winged with thoughts of truth and maj-
esty,
Flits round the tyrant's sceptre like a cloud,
And bursts the peopled prisons, and cries
aloud,
“ My name is Legion ! ” — that majestic
tongue
Which Calderon over the desert flung

Letter to Maria Gisborne

Of ages and of nations ; and which found
An echo in our hearts, and with the sound
Startled oblivion ; — thou wert then to me
As is a nurse — when inarticulately
A child would talk as its grown parents do.
If living winds the rapid clouds pursue,
If hawks chase doves through the ethereal way,
Huntsmen the innocent deer, and beasts their
 prey,
Why should not we rouse with the spirit's
 blast
Out of the forest of the pathless past
These recollected pleasures ?

 You are now
In London, that great sea, whose ebb and flow
At once is deaf and loud, and on the shore
Vomits its wrecks, and still howls on for more.
Yet in its depth what treasures ! You will see
That which was Godwin, — greater none than
 he
Though fallen — and fallen on evil times — to
 stand
Among the spirits of our age and land,

Letter to Maria Gisborne

Before the dread tribunal of *to come*
The foremost, — while Rebuke cowers pale
and dumb.
You will see Coleridge — he who sits obscure
In the exceeding lustre, and the pure
Intense irradiation of a mind,
Which, with its own internal lightning blind,
Flags wearily through darkness and despair —
A cloud-encircled meteor of the air,
A hooded eagle among blinking owls. —
You will see Hunt — one of those happy souls
Which are the salt of the earth, and without
whom
This world would smell like what it is — a
tomb ;
Who is, what others seem ; his room no doubt
Is still adorned by many a cast from Shout,
With graceful flowers tastefully placed about ;
And coronals of bay from ribbons hung,
And brighter wreaths in neat disorder flung ;
The gifts of the most learn'd among some
dozens
Of female friends, sisters-in-law, and cousins.

Letter to Maria Gisborne

And there is he with his eternal puns,
Which beat the dullest brain for smiles, like
duns

Thundering for money at a poet's door ;
Alas ! it is no use to say, " I'm poor !"
Or oft in graver mood, when he will look
Things wiser than were ever read in book,
Except in Shakespeare's wisest tenderness. —
You will see Hogg, — and I cannot express
His virtues, — though I know that they are
great,

Because he locks, then barricades the gate
Within which they inhabit ; — of his wit
And wisdom, you'll cry out when you are bit.
He is a pearl within an oyster shell,
One of the richest of the deep ; — and there
Is English Peacock with his mountain fair
Turned into a Flamingo ; — that shy bird
That gleams i' the Indian air — have you not
heard

When a man marries, dies, or turns Hindoo,
His best friends hear no more of him ? — but
you

Letter to Maria Gisborne

Will see him, and will like him too, I hope,
With the milk-white Snowdonian Antelope
Matched with this camelopard — his fine wit
Makes such a wound, the knife is lost in it;
A strain too learned for a shallow age,
Too wise for selfish bigots; let his page,
Which charms the chosen spirits of the time,
Fold itself up for the serener clime
Of years to come, and find its recompense
In that just expectation. — Wit and sense,
Virtue and human knowledge; all that might
Make this dull world a business of delight,
Are all combined in Horace Smith. — And
these,
With some exceptions, which I need not tease
Your patience by descanting on, — are all
You and I know in London.

I recall

My thoughts, and bid you look upon the
night.

As water does a sponge, so the moonlight
Fills the void, hollow, universal air —
What see you? — unpavilioned heaven is fair

Letter to Maria Gisborne

Whether the moon, into her chamber gone,
Leaves midnight to the golden stars, or wan
Climbs with diminished beams the azure steep ;
Or whether clouds sail o'er the inverse deep,
Piloted by the many-wandering blast,
And the rare stars rush through them dim and
fast : —

All this is beautiful in every land. —
But what see you beside ? — a shabby stand
Of Hackney coaches — a brick house or wall
Fencing some lonely court, white with the scrawl
Of our unhappy politics ; — or worse —
A wretched woman reeling by, whose curse
Mixed with the watchman's, partner of her
trade,

You must accept in place of serenade —
Or yellow-haired Pollonia murmuring,
To Henry, some unutterable thing.
I see a chaos of green leaves and fruit
Built round dark caverns, even to the root
Of the living stems that feed them — in whose
bowers
There sleep in their dark dew the folded flowers ;

Letter to Maria Gisborne

Beyond, the surface of the unsickled corn
Trembles not in the slumbering air, and borne
In circles quaint, and ever changing dance,
Like wingèd stars the fireflies flash and glance,
Pale in the open moonshine, but each one
Under the dark trees seems a little sun,
A meteor tamed ; a fixed star gone astray
From the silver regions of the milky way ;—
Afar the Contadino's song is heard,
Rude, but made sweet by distance — and a bird
Which cannot be the Nightingale, and yet
I know none else that sings so sweet as it
At this late hour ; — and then all is still —
Now Italy or London, which you will !

Next winter you must pass with me ; I'll
have

My house by that time turned into a grave
Of dead despondence and low-thoughted care,
And all the dreams which our tormentors are ;
Oh ! that Hunt, Hogg, Peacock, and Smith
were there,
With everything belonging to them fair !—

Letter to Maria Gisborne

We will have books, Spanish, Italian, Greek ;
And ask one week to make another week
As like his father, as I'm unlike mine,
Which is not his fault, as you may divine.
Though we eat little flesh and drink no
 wine,

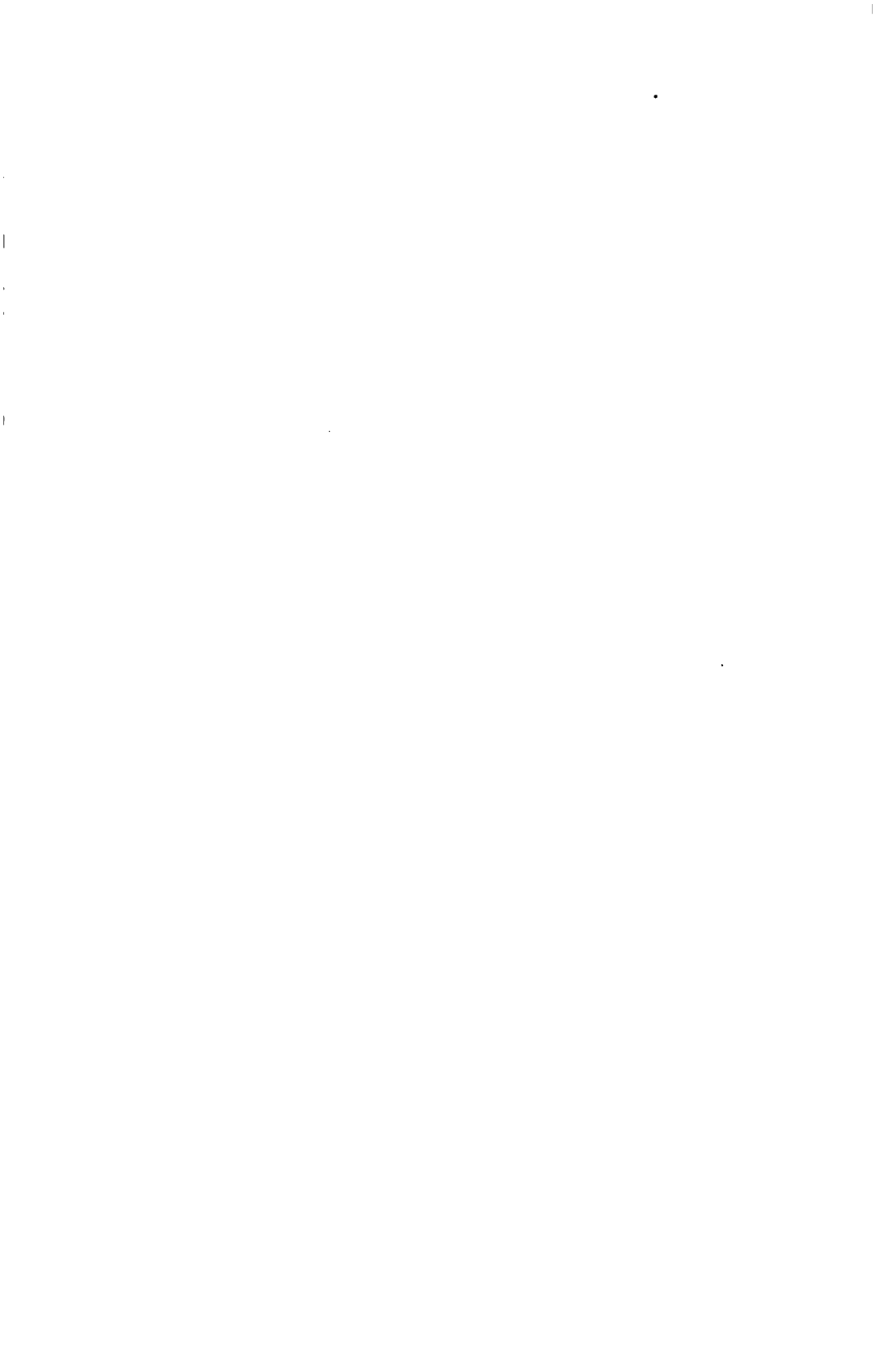
Yet let's be merry : we'll have tea and toast ;
Custards for supper, and an endless host
Of syllabubs and jellies and mince pies,
And other such ladylike luxuries, —
Feasting on which we will philosophize !
And we'll have fires out of the Grand Duke's
 wood,

To thaw the six weeks' winter in our blood.
And then we'll talk ;— what shall we talk
 about ?

Oh ! there are themes enough for many a bout
Of thought-entangled descant ;— as to
 nerves —

With cones and parallelograms and curves
I've sworn to strangle them if once they
 dare

To bother me — when you are with me there.





To Mary

(On her objecting to the following poem, upon the score of
its containing no human interest)

I.



HOW, my dear Mary, are you critic-
bitten,
(For vipers kill, though dead,)
by some review,

That you condemn these verses I have written,
Because they tell no story, false or true!
What, though no mice are caught by a young
kitten,
May it not leap and play as grown cats do,
Till its claws come? Prithee, for this one time,
Content thee with a visionary rhyme.

II.

What hand would crush the silken-wingèd fly,
The youngest of inconstant April's minions,

To Mary

Because it cannot climb the purest sky,
Where the swan sings, amid the sun's
 joonions?
Not mine. Thou knowest 'tis its doom to
 die,
When day shall hide within her twilight
 pinnions,
The innocent eyes, and the eternal smile,
Serenely as thine, which lent it life awhile.

III.

To thy fair feet a wingèd Vision came,
Whose date should have been longer than a
 day,
And o'er thy head did beat its wings for
 fame,
And in thy sight its fading plumes dis-
 play;
The watery bow burned in the evening flame,
But the shower fell, the swift sun went his
 way —
And that is dead. Oh, let me not believe
That anything of mine is fit to live!

To Mary

IV.

Wordsworth informs us he was nineteen years
Considering and retouching Peter Bell ;
Watering his laurels with the killing tears
Of slow, dull care, so that their roots to hell
Might pierce, and their wide branches blot the
spheres
Of heaven, with dewy leaves and flowers ;
this well
May be, for Heaven and Earth conspire to foil
The overbusy gardener's blundering toil.

V.

My Witch indeed is not so sweet a creature
As Ruth and Lucy, whom his graceful praise
Clothes for our grandsons — but she matches
Peter,
Though he took nineteen years, and she
three days
In dressing. Light the vest of flowing metre
She wears ; he, proud as dandy with his
stays,

To Mary

Has hung upon his wiry limbs a dress
Like King Lear's "looped and windowed rag-
gedness."

VI.

If you strip Peter, you will see a fellow
Scorched by Hell's hyperequatorial climate
Into a kind of a sulphureous yellow :
A lean mark, hardly fit to fling a rhyme at ;
In shape a Scaramouch, in hue Othello.
If you unveil my Witch, no priest nor
primate
Can shrieve you of that sin, — if sin there be
In love, when it becomes idolatry.





The Witch of Atlas

I.



BEFORE those cruel Twins, whom
at one birth
Incestuous Change bore to her
father Time,
Error and Truth, had hunted from the Earth
All those bright natures which adorned its
prime,
And left us nothing to believe in, worth
The pains of putting into learnèd rhyme,
A lady-witch there lived on Atlas' mountain
Within a cavern, by a secret fountain.

II.

Her mother was one of the Atlantides :
The all-beholding Sun had ne'er beholden

The Witch of Atlas

In his wide voyage o'er continents and seas
So fair a creature, as she lay enfolden
In the warm shadow of her loveliness ; —
He kissed her with his beams, and made all
golden
The chamber of gray rock in which she lay —
She, in that dream of joy, dissolved away.

III.

'Tis said, she first was changed into a vapour,
And then into a cloud, such clouds as flit
Like splendour-wingèd moths about a taper,
Round the red west when the sun dies
in it:
And then into a meteor, such as caper
On hilltops when the moon is in a fit:
Then, into one of those mysterious stars
Which hide themselves between the Earth and
Mars.

IV.

Ten times the Mother of the Months had
bent
Her bow beside the folding-star, and bidden

The Witch of Atlas

With that bright sign the billows to indent
The sea - deserted sand — like children
chidden,
At her command they ever came and went —
Since in that cave a dewy splendour hidden
Took shape and motion : with the living form
Of this embodied Power, the cave grew warm.

v.

A lovely lady garmented in light
From her own beauty — deep her eyes, as
are
Two openings of unfathomable night
Seen through a Temple's cloven roof — her
hair
Dark — the dim brain whirls dizzy with delight,
Picturing her form ; her soft smiles shone afar,
And her low voice was heard like love, and drew
All living things towards this wonder new.

vi.

And first the spotted camelopard came,
And then the wise and fearless elephant ;

The Witch of Atlas

Then the sly serpent, in the golden flame
Of his own volumes interwolved; — all gaunt
And sanguine beasts her gentle looks made
tame.

They drank before her at her sacred fount;
And every beast of beating heart grew bold,
Such gentleness and power even to behold.

VII.

The brinded lioness led forth her young,
That she might teach them how they should
forego

Their inborn thirst of death; the pard unstrung
His sinews at her feet, and sought to know
With looks whose motions spoke without a
tongue

How he might be as gentle as the doe.
The magic circle of her voice and eyes
All savage natures did imparadise.

VIII.

And old Silenus, shaking a green stick
Of lilies, and the wood-gods in a crew

Atlas

then in

and;—

the look

sacred

to grow

to be

er young

ow there

e pard

ought to

oke with

s the doe

id eyes

se.

n stick

n a crew

The Witch of Atlas (Page 221).

In this cave they found a lady sitting upon a seat of emerald stone.

THE

of the

of the

of the

of the

of the

of the

of the



The Witch of Atlas

Came, blithe, as in the olive copses thick
Cicadæ are, drunk with the noonday
dew :
And Dryope and Faunus followed quick,
Teasing the God to sing them something
new ;
Till in this cave they found the lady
lone,
Sitting upon a seat of emerald stone.

IX.

And universal Pan, 'tis said, was there,
And though none saw him,—through the
adamant
Of the deep mountains, through the trackless
air,
And through those living spirits, like a
want
He past out of his everlasting lair
Where the quick heart of the great world
doth pant,
And felt that wondrous lady all alone,—
And she felt him, upon her emerald throne.

The Witch of Atlas

x.

And every nymph of stream and spreading tree,
And every shepherdess of Ocean's flocks,
Who drives her white waves over the green
sea,

And Ocean with the brine on his gray locks,
And quaint Priapus with his company,

All came, much wondering how the en-
wombèd rocks

Could have brought forth so beautiful a
birth ;—

Her love subdued their wonder and their mirth.

xI.

The herdsmen and the mountain maidens
came,

And the rude kings of pastoral Garamant—
Their spirits shook within them, as a flame
Stirred by the air under a cavern gaunt :

Pigmies, and Polyphemes, by many a name,
Centaur's and Satyr's, and such shapes as
haunt

The Witch of Atlas

Wet clefts,—and lumps neither alive nor
dead,
Dog-headed, bosom-eyed, and bird-footed.

XII.

For she was beautiful — her beauty made
The bright world dim, and everything beside
Seemed like the fleeting image of a shade :
No thought of living spirit could abide,
Which to her looks had ever been betrayed,
On any object in the world so wide,
On any hope within the circling skies,
But on her form, and in her inmost eyes.

XIII.

Which when the lady knew, she took her
spindle
And twined three threads of fleecy mist, and
three
Long lines of light, such as the dawn may
kindle
The clouds and waves and mountains with ;
and she

The Witch of Atlas

As many sun-beams on their lamps could
outvade

In the richest room, wove skillfully ;
And with these threads a subtle veil she wove —
A shimmer for the remembrance of her love.

III.

The many passages of her airy dwelling
Were known with magic resources — sounds
Of air.

Which had the power all spirits of compelling,
Ling.

Founded in coils of crystal silence there ;
Such as we hear in youth, and think the feel-
ing

Will never die — yet ere we are aware,
The feeling and the sound are dead and gone,
And the regret they leave remains alone,

IV.

And there lay Visions swift, and sweet, and
quaint,

Each in its thin sheath, like a chrysalis,

The Witch of Atlas

Some eager to burst forth, some weak and faint

With the soft burthen of intensest bliss ;
It was their work to bear to many a saint
Whose heart adores the shrine which holiest
is,

Even Love's : — and others white, green, gray,
and black,
And of all shapes — and each was at her beck.

xvi.

And odours in a kind of aviary
Of ever-blooming Eden-trees she kept,
Clipt in a floating net, a love-sick Fairy
Had woven from dew-beams while the moon
yet slept ;
As bats at the wired window of a dairy,
They beat their vans ; and each was an
adept,
When loosed and missioned, making wings of
winds,
To stir sweet thoughts or sad, in destined
minds.

The Witch of Atlas

XVII.

And liquors clear and sweet, whose healthfu
might
 Could medicine the sick soul to happy sleep
And change eternal death into a night
 Of glorious dreams — or if eyes needs must
 weep,
Could make their tears all wonder and delight,
 She in her crystal vials did closely keep :
If men could drink of those clear vials, 'tis said
The living were not envied of the dead.

XVIII.

Her cave was stored with scrolls of strange
device,
 The works of some Saturnian Archimage,
Which taught the expiations at whose price
 Men from the Gods might win that happy
 age
Too lightly lost, redeeming native vice ;
 And which might quench the Earth-con-
 suming rage

The Witch of Atlas

Of gold and blood — till men should live and
move

Harmonious as the sacred stars above ;

XIX.

And how all things that seem untamable,

Not to be checked and not to be confined,

Obeys the spells of wisdom's wizard skill ;

Time, earth, and fire — the ocean and the
wind,

And all their shapes — and man's imperial
will ;

And other scrolls whose writings did unbind
The inmost lore of Love — let the profane
Tremble to ask what secrets they contain.

XX.

And wondrous works of substances unknown,

To which the enchantment of her father's
power

Had changed those ragged blocks of savage
stone,

Were heaped in the recesses of her bower ;

The Witch of Atlas

Carved lamps and chalices, and vials which
shone
In their own golden beams — each like
flower,
Out of whose depth a firefly shakes his light
Under a cypress in a starless night.

XXI.

At first she lived alone in this wild home,
And her own thoughts were each a minister
Clothing themselves, or with the ocean foam,
Or with the wind, or with the speed of fire,
To work whatever purposes might come
Into her mind; such power her mighty
Sire
Had girt them with, whether to fly or run,
Through all the regions which he shines upon

XXII.

The Ocean-nymphs and Hamadryades,
Oreads and Naiads, with long weedy locks,
Offered to do her bidding through the seas,
Under the earth, and in the hollow rocks,

The Witch of Atlas

And far beneath the matted roots of trees,
And in the gnarlèd heart of stubborn oaks,
So they might live for ever in the light
Of her sweet presence — each a satellite.

XXIII.

“This may not be,” the wizard maid replied ;
“The fountains where the Naiades bedew
Their shining hair at length are drained and
dried ;
The solid oaks forget their strength, and strew
Their latest leaf upon the mountains wide ;
The boundless ocean like a drop of dew
Will be consumed — the stubborn centre must
Be scattered, like a cloud of summer dust.

XXIV.

“And ye with them will perish, one by one ; —
If I must sigh to think that this shall be,
If I must weep when the surviving Sun
Shall smile on your decay — oh, ask not me
To love you till your little ~~rose~~ is run ;
I cannot die as ye must — over me

The Witch of Atlas

Your leaves shall glance — the streams in which
ye dwell
Shall be my paths henceforth, and so — fare
well ! ” —

xxv.

She spoke and wept : — the dark and azure wel
Sparkled beneath the shower of her bright
tears,
And every little circlet where they fell
Flung to the cavern-roof inconstant spheres
And intertangled lines of light : — a knell
Of sobbing voices came upon her ears
From those departing Forms, o'er the serene
Of the white streams and of the forest green.

xxvi.

All day the wizard lady sate aloof,
Spelling out scrolls of dread antiquity,
Under the cavern's fountain-lighted roof ;
Or broidering the pictured poesy
Of some high tale upon her growing woof,
Which the sweet splendour of her smiles
could dye

The Witch of Atlas

In hues outshining Heaven — and ever she
Added some grace to the wrought poesy.

XXVII.

While on her hearth lay blazing many a piece
Of sandalwood, rare gums, and cinnamon ;
Men scarcely know how beautiful fire is —
Each flame of it is as a precious stone
Dissolved in ever-moving light, and this
Belongs to each and all who gaze upon.
The Witch beheld it not, for in her hand
She held a woof that dimmed the burning
brand.

XXVIII.

This lady never slept, but lay in trance
All night within the fountain — as in sleep.
Its emerald crags glowed in her beauty's glance ;
Through the green splendour of the water
deep
She saw the constellations reel and dance
Like fireflies — and withal did ever keep
The tenor of her contemplations calm,
With open eyes, closed feet and folded palm.

The Witch of Atlas

xxix.

And when the whirlwinds and the clouds descended

From the white pinnacles of that cold hill,
She past at dewfall to a space extended,

Where in a lawn of flowering asphodel
Amid a wood of pines and cedars blended,

There yawned an inextinguishable well
Of crimson fire — full even to the brim,
And overflowing all the margin trim.

xxx.

Within the which she lay when the fierce war
Of wintry winds shook that innocuous liquor

In many a mimic moon and bearded star
O'er woods and lawns ; — the serpent heard
it flicker

In sleep, and dreaming still, he crept afar —

And when the windless snow descended
thicker

Than autumn leaves, she watched it as it came
Melt on the surface of the level flame.

The Witch of Atlas

xxxI.

She had a Boat, which some say Vulcan wrought
For Venus, as the chariot of her star ;
But it was found too feeble to be fraught
With all the ardours in that sphere which
are,
And so she sold it, and Apollo bought
And gave it to this daughter : from a car
Changed to the fairest and the lightest boat
Which ever upon mortal stream did float.

xxxII.

And others say, that, when but three hours
old,
The first-born Love out of his cradle leapt,
And clove dun Chaos with his wings of gold,
And like an horticultural adept,
Stole a strange seed, and wrapt it up in mould,
And sowed it in his mother's star, and
kept
Watering it all the summer with sweet dew,
And with his wings fanning it as it grew.

The Witch of Atlas

XXXIII.

The plant grew strong and green, the snowy
flower

Fell, and the long and gourd-like fruit began
To turn the light and dew by inward power

To its own substance; woven tracery ran
Of light firm texture, ribbed and branching,
o'er

The solid rind, like a leaf's veinèd fan —
Of which Love scooped this boat — and with
soft motion

Piloted it round the circumfluous ocean.

XXXIV.

This boat she moored upon her fount, and lit
A living spirit within all its frame,
Breathing the soul of swiftness into it.

Couched on the fountain like a panther tame,
One of the twain at Evan's feet that sit —

Or as on Vesta's sceptre a swift flame —
Or on blind Homer's heart a wingèd thought, —
In joyous expectation lay the boat.

The Witch of Atlas

xxxv.

Then by strange art she kneaded fire and
snow

Together, tempering the repugnant mass
With liquid love — all things together grow
Through which the harmony of love can
pass ;

And a fair Shape out of her hands did flow —

A living Image, which did far surpass
In beauty that bright shape of vital stone
Which drew the heart out of Pygmalion.

xxxvi.

A sexless thing it was, and in its growth

It seemed to have developed no defect
Of either sex, yet all the grace of both, —

In gentleness and strength its limbs were
decked ;

The bosom swelled lightly with its full youth,

The countenance was such as might select
Some artist that his skill should never die,
Imaging forth such perfect purity.

The Witch of Atlas

XXXVII.

From its smooth shoulders hung two rapid
wings,

Fit to have borne it to the seventh sphere
Tipt with the speed of liquid lightnings,

Dyed in the ardours of the atmosphere :

She led her creature to the boiling springs

Where the light boat was moored, and said

“ Sit here ! ”

And pointed to the prow, and took her seat

Beside the rudder, with opposing feet.

XXXVIII.

And down the streams which clove those moun-
tains vast,

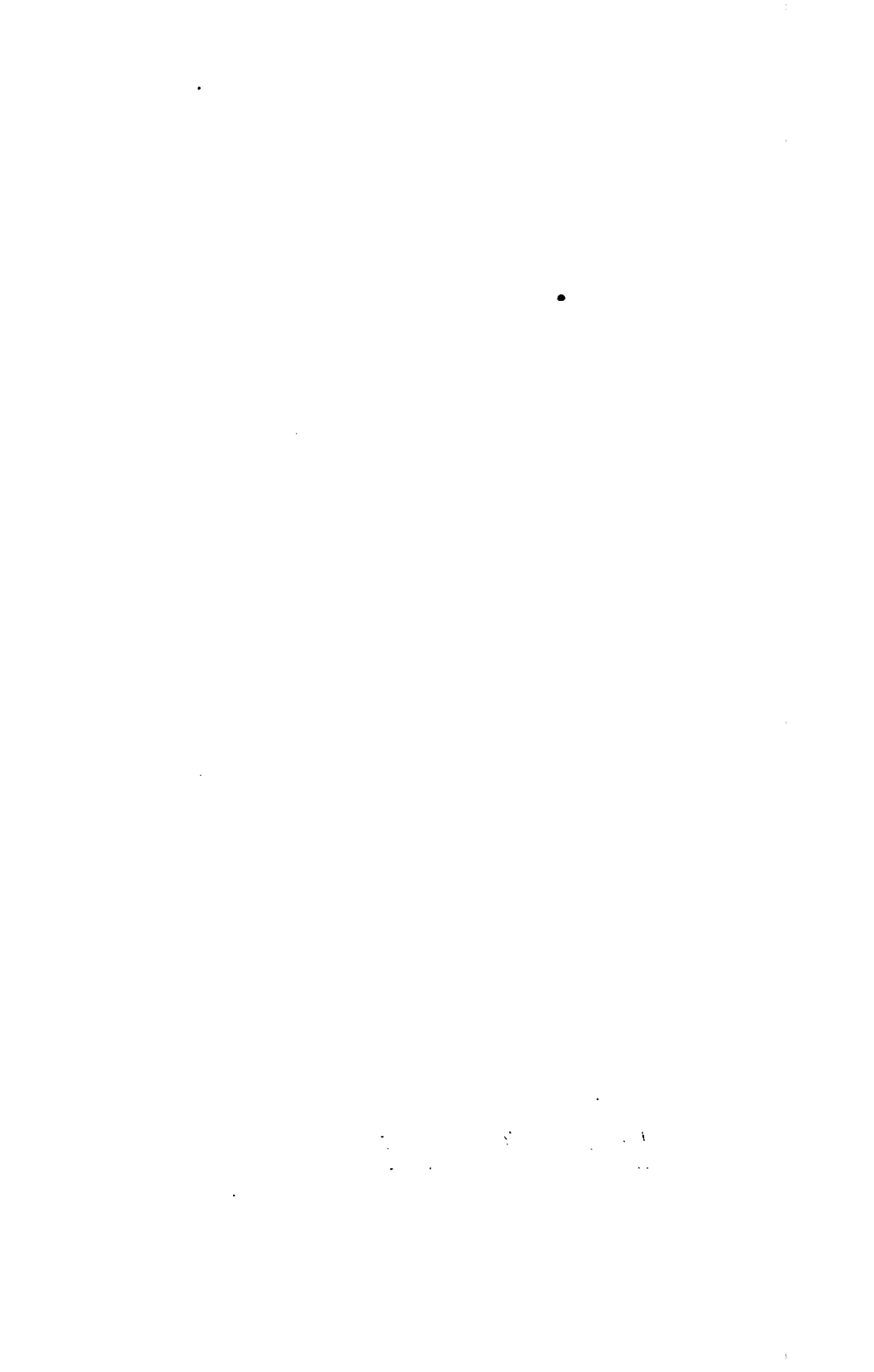
Around their inland islets, and amid
The panther-peopled forests, whose shade cast

Darkness and odours, and a pleasure hid
In melancholy gloom, the pinnacle past ;

By many a star-surrounded pyramid
Of icy crag cleaving the purple sky,
And caverns yawning round unfathomably.

The Witch of Itan Page 3370.

From the old times in which I was born, due to





The Witch of Atlas

XXXIX.

The silver noon into that winding dell,
With slanted gleam athwart the forest tops,
Tempered like golden evening, feebly fell ;
A green and glowing light, like that which
drops
From folded lilies in which glowworms dwell,
When earth over her face night's mantle
wraps ;
Between the severed mountains lay on high,
Over the stream, a narrow rift of sky.

XL.

And ever as she went, the Image lay
With folded wings and unawakened eyes ;
And o'er its gentle countenance did play
The busy dreams, as thick as summer flies,
Chasing the rapid smiles that would not stay,
And drinking the warm tears, and the sweet
sighs
Inhaling, which, with busy murmur vain,
They had aroused from that full heart and brain.

The Witch of Atlas

XLII.

And ever down the prone vale, like a cloud
Upon a stream of wind, the pinnacle went :
Now lingering on the pools, in which abode
The calm and darkness of the deep content
In which they paused ; now o'er the shallow
road
Of white and dancing waters, all besprent
With sand and polished pebbles : — morta
boat
In such a shallow rapid could not float.

XLIII.

And down the earthquaking cataracts which
shiver
Their snowlike waters into golden air,
Or under chasms unfathomable ever
Selpulchre them, till in their rage they tear
A subterranean portal for the river,
It fled — the circling sunbows did upbear
Its fall down the hoar precipice of spray,
Lighting it far upon its lampless way.

The Witch of Atlas

XLIII.

And when the wizard lady would ascend
The labyrinths of some many-winding vale,
Which to the inmost mountain upward tend —
She called “Hermaphroditus!” — and the
pale
And heavy hue which slumber could extend
Over its lips and eyes, as on the gale
A rapid shadow from a slope of grass,
Into the darkness of the stream did pass.

XLIV.

And it unfurled its heaven-coloured pinions,
With stars of fire spotting the stream below ;
And from above into the Sun’s dominions
Flinging a glory, like the golden glow
In which Spring clothes her emerald-wingèd
minions,
All interwoven with fine feathery snow
And moonlight splendour of intensest rime,
With which frost paints the pines in winter
time.

The Witch of Atlas

XLV.

And then it winnowed the Elysian air
Which ever hung about that lady bright,
With its ethereal vans — and speeding there,
Like a star up the torrent of the night,
Or a swift eagle in the morning glare
Breasting the whirlwind with impetuous
flight,
The pinnacle, oared by those enchanted wings,
Clove the fierce streams towards their upper
springs.

XLVI.

The water flashed like sunlight by the prow
Of a noon-wandering meteor flung to
Heaven ;
The still air seemed as if its waves did flow
In tempest down the mountains ; loosely
driven
The lady's radiant hair streamed to and fro :
Beneath, the billows having vainly striven,
Indignant and impetuous, roared to feel
The swift and steady motion of the keel.

The Witch of Atlas

XLVII.

Or, when the weary moon was in the wane,
Or in the noon of interlunar night,
The lady-witch in visions could not chain
Her spirit; but sailed forth under the light
Of shooting stars, and bade extend amain
Its storm-outspeeding wings, the Hermaph-
rodite;
She to the Austral waters took her way,
Beyond the fabulous Thamondocana.

XLVIII.

Where, like a meadow which no scythe has
shaven,
Which rain could never bend, or whirl-blast
shake,
With the Antarctic constellations paven,
Canopus and his crew, lay the Austral
lake —
There she would build herself a windless haven
Out of the clouds whose moving turrets
make

The Witch of Atlas

The bastions of the storm, when through the
sky
The spirits of the tempest thundered by.

XLIX.

A haven beneath whose translucent floor
The tremulous stars sparkled unfathomably,
And around which the solid vapours hoar,
Based on the level waters, to the sky
Lifted their dreadful crags, and like a shore
Of wintry mountains, inaccessibly
Hemmed in with rifts and precipices gray,
And hanging crags, many a cove and bay.

L.

And whilst the outer lake beneath the lash
Of the wind's scourge foamed like a
wounded thing,
And the incessant hail with stony clash
Ploughed up the waters, and the flagging wing
Of the roused cormorant in the lightning flash
Looked like the wreck of some wind-wan-
dering

The Witch of Atlas

Fragment of inky thunder-smoke — this haven
Was as a gem to copy Heaven engraven.

LI.

On which that lady played her many pranks,
 Circling the image of a shooting star,
Even as a tiger on Hydaspes' banks
 Outspeeds the antelopes which speediest are,
In her light boat ; and many quips and cranks
 She played upon the water, till the car
Of the late moon, like a sick matron wan,
To journey from the misty east began.

LII.

And then she called out of the hollow turrets
 Of those high clouds, white, golden, and
 vermilion,
The armies of her ministering spirits —
 In mighty legions, million after million,
They came, each troop emblazoning its merits
 On meteor flags ; and many a proud pavilion
Of the intertexture of the atmosphere
They pitched upon the plain of the calm mere.

The Witch of Atlas

LIII.

They framed the imperial tent of their great
Queen
Of woven exhalations, underlaid
With lambent lightning-fire, as may be seen
A dome of thin and open ivory inlaid
With crimson silk — cressets from the serene
Hung there, and on the water for her
tread
A tapestry of fleece-like mist was strewn,
Dyed in the beams of the ascending moon.

LIV.

And on a throne o'erlaid with starlight, caught
Upon those wandering isles of aëry dew,
Which highest shoals of mountain shipwreck
not,
She sate, and heard all that had happened
new
Between the earth and moon, since they had
brought
The last intelligence — and now she grew

The Witch of Atlas

Pale as that moon, lost in the watery night —
And now she wept, and now she laughed out-
right.

LV.

These were tame pleasures ; she would often
climb

The steepest ladder of the crudded rack
Up to some beakèd cape of cloud sublime,
And like Arion on the dolphin's back
Ride singing through the shoreless air ; — oft-
time

Following the serpent lightning's winding
track,
She ran upon the platforms of the wind,
And laughed to hear the fire-balls roar behind.

LVI.

And sometimes to those streams of upper air
Which whirl the earth in its diurnal round,
She would ascend, and win the spirits there
To let her join their chorus. Mortals found
That on those days the sky was calm and fair,
And mystic snatches of harmonious sound

The Witch of Atlas

Wandered upon the earth where'er she past,
And happy thoughts of hope, too sweet to last.

LVII.

But her choice sport was, in the hours of
sleep,

To glide adown old Nilus, where he threads
Egypt and Æthiopia, from the steep

Of utmost Axumè, until he spreads,
Like a calm flock of silver-fleecèd sheep,

His waters on the plain : and crested heads
Of cities and proud temples gleam amid,
And many a vapour-belted pyramid.

LVIII.

By Mœris and the Mareotid lakes,
Strewn with faint blooms like bridal chamber
floors,

Where naked boys bridling tame water-snakes,
Or charioteering ghastly alligators,

Had left on the sweet waters mighty wakes
Of those huge forms — within the brazen
doors

The Witch of Atlas

Of the great Labyrinth slept both boy and
beast,
Tired with the pomp of their Osirian feast.

LIX.

And where within the surface of the river
The shadows of the massy temples lie,
And never are erased — but tremble ever
Like things which every cloud can doom to
die,
Through lotus-paven canals, and wheresoever
The works of man pierced that serenest sky
With tombs, and towers, and fanes, 'twas her
delight
To wander in the shadow of the night.

LX.

With motion like the spirit of that wind
Whose soft step deepens slumber, her light
feet
Past through the peopled haunts of human kind,
Scattering sweet visions from her presence
sweet,

The Witch of Atlas

Through fane, and palace-court, and labyrinth
mined

With many a dark and subterranean street
Under the Nile, through chambers high and
deep

She past, observing mortals in their sleep.

LXI.

A pleasure sweet doubtless it was to see
Mortals subdued in all the shapes of sleep.
Here lay two sister twins in infancy ;
There, a lone youth who in his dreams did
weep ;

Within, two lovers linkèd innocently
In their loose locks which over both did creep
Like ivy from one stem ; — and there lay calm
Old age with snow-bright hair and folded palm.

LXII.

But other troubled forms of sleep she saw,
Not to be mirrored in a holy song —
Distortions foul of supernatural awe,
And pale imaginings of visioned wrong ;

The Witch of Atlas

And all the code of custom's lawless law

Written upon the brows of old and young :
" This," said the wizard-maiden, " is the strife
Which stirs the liquid surface of man's life."

LXIII.

And little did the sight disturb her soul. —

We, the weak mariners of that wide lake
Where'er its shore extend or billows roll,

Our course unpiloted and starless make
O'er its wild surface to an unknown goal : —

But she in the calm depths her way could
take,

Where in bright bowers immortal forms abide
Beneath the weltering of the restless tide.

LXIV.

And she saw princes couched under the glow
Of sunlike gems ; and round each temple-
court

In dormitories ranged, row after row,

She saw the priests asleep — all of one
sort —

The Witch of Atlas

For all were educated to be so. —

The peasants in their huts, and in the port
The sailors she saw cradled on the waves,
And the dead lulled within their dreamless
 graves.

LXV.

And all the forms in which those spirits lay
 Were to her sight like the diaphanous
Veils, in which those sweet ladies oft array
 Their delicate limbs, who would conceal
 from us
Only their scorn of all concealment: they
 Move in the light of their own beauty
 thus.
But these and all now lay with sleep upon
 them,
And little thought a Witch was looking on
 them.

LXVI.

She, all those human figures breathing there,
 Beheld as living spirits — to her eyes
The naked beauty of the soul lay bare,
 And often through a rude and worn disguise

The Witch of Atlas

She saw the inner form most bright and fair —
And then she had a charm of strange device,
Which, murmured on mute lips with tender
tone,
Could make that spirit mingle with her own.

LXVII.

Alas ! Aurora, what wouldst thou have given
For such a charm when Tithon became
gray?
Or how much, Venus, of thy silver Heaven
Wouldst thou have yielded, ere Proserpina
Had half (oh ! why not all ?) the debt forgiven
Which dear Adonis had been doomed to
pay,
To any witch who would have taught you it ?
The Heliad doth not know its value yet.

LXVIII.

'Tis said in after times her spirit free
Knew what love was, and felt itself alone —
But holy Dian could not chaster be
Before she stooped to kiss Endymion,

The Witch of Atlas

Than now this lady — like a sexless bee
Tasting all blossoms, and confined to none,
Among those mortal forms, the wizard-maiden
Past with an eye serene and heart unladen.

LXIX.

To those she saw most beautiful, she gave
Strange panacea in a crystal bowl : —
They drank in their deep sleep of that sweet
wave,
And lived thenceforward as if some control,
Mightier than life, were in them ; and the
grave
Of such, when death oppressed the weary
soul,
Was as a green and overarching bower
Lit by the gems of many a starry flower.

LXX.

For on the night when they were buried, she
Restored the embalmers' ruining, and shook
The light out of the funeral lamps, to be
A mimic day within that deathly nook ;

The Witch of Atlas

And she unwound the woven imagery
Of second childhood's swaddling bands, and
took
The coffin, its last cradle, from its niche,
And threw it with contempt into a ditch.

LXXI.

And there the body lay, age after age,
Mute, breathing, beating, warm, and unde-
caying,
Like one asleep in a green hermitage,
With gentle smiles about its eyelids play-
ing,
And living in its dreams beyond the rage
Of death or life ; while they were still array-
ing
In liveries ever new, the rapid, blind,
And fleeting generations of mankind.

LXXII.

And she would write strange dreams upon the
brain
Of those who were less beautiful, and make

The Witch of Atlas

All harsh and crooked purposes more vain
Than in the desert is the serpent's wake
Which the sand covers, — all his evil gain
The miser in such dreams would rise and
shake
Into a beggar's lap ; — the lying scribe
Would his own lies betray without a bribe.

LXXIII.

The priests would write an explanation full,
Translating hieroglyphics into Greek,
How the god Apis really was a bull,
And nothing more ; and bid the herald stick
The same against the temple doors, and pull
The old cant down ; they licensed all to
speak
Whate'er they thought of hawks, and cats, and
geese,
By pastoral letters to each diocese.

LXXIV.

The king would dress an ape up in his crown
And robes, and seat him on his glorious seat,

The Witch of Atlas

And on the right hand of the sunlike throne
Would place a gaudy mock-bird to re-
peat
The chatterings of the monkey. — Every one
Of the prone courtiers crawled to kiss the
feet
Of their great Emperor, when the morning
came,
And kissed — alas, how many kiss the same !

LXXV.

The soldiers dreamed that they were black-
smiths, and
Walked out of quarters in somnambulism ;
Round the red anvils you might see them
stand
Like Cyclopes in Vulcan's sooty abysm,
Beating their swords to ploughshares ; — in a
band
The gaolers sent those of the liberal schism
Free through the streets of Memphis, much, I
wis,
To the annoyance of King Amasis.

The Witch of Atlas

LXXVI.

And timid lovers who had been so coy,
They hardly knew whether they loved or
not,
Would rise out of their rest, and take sweet
joy,
To the fulfilment of their inmost thought ;
And when next day the maiden and the
boy
Met one another, both, like sinners caught,
Blushed at the thing which each believed was
done
Only in fancy — till the tenth moon shone ;

LXXVII.

And then the Witch would let them take no
ill :
Of many thousand schemes which lovers
find,
The Witch found one, — and so they took
their fill
Of happiness in marriage warm and kind.

The Witch of Atlas

Friends who, by practice of some envious skill,
Were torn apart, a wide wound, mind from
mind !

She did unite again with visions clear
Of deep affection and of truth sincere.

LXXVIII.

These were the pranks she played among the
cities

Of mortal men, and what she did to sprites
And Gods, entangling them in her sweet dit-
ties

To do her will, and show their subtle slights,
I will declare another time ; for it is

A tale more fit for the weird winter nights,
Than for these garish summer days, when we
Scarcely believe much more than we can see.





Note on the Witch of Atlas, by Mrs. Shelley

WE spent the summer of 1820 at the Baths of San Giuliano, four miles from Pisa. These baths were of great use to Shelley in soothing his nervous irritability. We made several excursions in the neighbourhood. The country around is fertile, and diversified and rendered picturesque by ranges of near hills and more distant mountains. The peasantry are a handsome, intelligent race; and there was a glad-some sunny heaven spread over us, that rendered home and every scene we visited cheerful and bright. During some of the hottest days of August, Shelley made a solitary journey on foot to the summit of Monte San

Note on The Witch of Atlas

Pellegrino — a mountain of some height, on the top of which there is a chapel, the object, during certain days of the year, of many pilgrimages. The excursion delighted him while it lasted; though he exerted himself too much, and the effect was considerable lassitude and weakness on his return. During the expedition he conceived the idea, and wrote, in the three days immediately succeeding to his return, the "Witch of Atlas." This poem is peculiarly characteristic of his tastes — wildly fanciful, full of brilliant imagery, and discarding human interest and passion, to revel in the fantastic ideas that his imagination suggested.

The surpassing excellence of "The Cenci" had made me greatly desire that Shelley should increase his popularity by adopting subjects that would more suit the popular taste than a poem conceived in the abstract and dreamy spirit of the "Witch of Atlas." It was not only that I wished him to acquire popularity as redounding to his fame; but I believed that he would obtain a greater mastery over his own powers, and greater happiness in his mind, if public applause crowned his endeavours. The few stanzas that precede the poem were

Note on The Witch of Atlas

addressed to me on my representing these ideas to him. Even now I believe that I was in the right. Shelley did not expect sympathy and approbation from the public; but the want of it took away a portion of the ardour that ought to have sustained him while writing. He was thrown on his own resources, and on the inspiration of his own soul; and wrote because his mind overflowed, without the hope of being appreciated. I had not the most distant wish that he should truckle in opinion, or submit his lofty aspirations for the human race to the low ambition and pride of the many; but I felt sure that, if his poems were more addressed to the common feelings of men, his proper rank among the writers of the day would be acknowledged, and that popularity as a poet would enable his countrymen to do justice to his character and virtues, which in those days it was the mode to attack with the most flagitious calumnies and insulting abuse. That he felt these things deeply cannot be doubted, though he armed himself with the consciousness of acting from a lofty and heroic sense of right. The truth burst from his heart sometimes in solitude, and he would write a few

Note on The Witch of Atlas

unfinished verses that showed that he felt the sting; among such I find the following:

“ Alas ! this is not what I thought Life was.
I knew that there were crimes and evil men,
Misery and hate ; nor did I hope to pass
Untouched by suffering through the rugged glen.
In mine own heart I saw as in a glass
The hearts of others. . . . And, when
I went among my kind, with triple brass
Of calm endurance my weak breast I armed,
To bear scorn, fear, and hate — a woful mass ! ”

I believed that all this morbid feeling would vanish if the chord of sympathy between him and his countrymen were touched. But my persuasions were vain, the mind could not be bent from its natural inclination. Shelley shrunk instinctively from portraying human passion, with its mixture of good and evil, of disappointment and disquiet. Such opened again the wounds of his own heart; and he loved to shelter himself rather in the airiest flights of fancy, forgetting love and hate, and regret and lost hope, in such imaginations as borrowed their hues from sunrise or sunset, from the yellow moonshine or paly twilight, from the aspect of the far ocean or the shadows

Note on The Witch of Atlas

of the woods,—which celebrated the singing of the winds among the pines, the flow of a murmuring stream, and the thousand harmonious sounds which Nature creates in her solitudes. These are the materials which form the “Witch of Atlas”: it is a brilliant congregation of ideas such as his senses gathered, and his fancy coloured, during his rambles in the sunny land he so much loved.



Œdipus Tyrannus

Or, Swellfoot the Tyrant

A Tragedy

In Two Acts

Translated from the Original Doric

“ Choose reform or civil war,
When thro' thy streets, instead of hare with dogs,
A CONSORT-QUEEN shall hunt a KING with hogs,
Riding on the IONIAN MINOTAUR.”



Advertisement



HIS tragedy is one of a triad, or system of three plays (an arrangement according to which the Greeks were accustomed to connect their dramatic representations), elucidating the wonderful and appalling fortunes of the SWELLFOOT dynasty. It was evidently written by some *learned Theban*, and, from its characteristic dulness, apparently before the duties on the importation of *Attic salt* had been repealed by the Bœotarchs. The tenderness with which he treats the PIGS proves him to have been a *sus Bœotiaë*; possibly *Epicuri de grege porcus*; for, as the poet observes:

“A fellow feeling makes us wond’rous kind.”

No liberty has been taken with the translation of this remarkable piece of antiquity,

Advertisement

except the suppressing a seditious and blasphemous Chorus of the Pigs and Bulls at the last act. The word Hoydipouse (or more properly *Œdipus*) has been rendered literally **SWELLFOOT**, without its having been conceived necessary to determine whether a swelling of the hind or the fore feet of the Swinish Monarch is particularly indicated.

Should the remaining portions of this tragedy be found, entitled, "Swellfoot in Angaria," and "Charité," the translator might be tempted to give them to the reading public.





Œdipus Tyrannus



ACT I.

SCENE I. — *A magnificent Temple, built of thigh-bones and death's beads, and tiled with scalps. Over the Altar the statue of Famine, veiled; a number of boars, sows, and sucking pigs, crowned with thistle, shamrock, and oak, sitting on the steps, and clinging round the altar of the Temple.*

Enter SWELLFOOT, in his royal robes, without perceiving the PIGS.

SWELLFOOT



THOU supreme Goddess! by whose
power divine
These graceful limbs are clothed
in proud array

[He contemplates himself with satisfaction.

Of gold and purple, and this kingly paunch

Œdipus Tyrannus

Swells like a sail before a favouring breeze,
And these most sacred nether promontories
Lie satisfied with layers of fat; and these
Bœotian cheeks, like Egypt's pyramid,
(Nor with less toil were their foundations
laid,*)

Sustain the cone of my untroubled brain,
That point, the emblem of a pointless nothing!

Thou to whom Kings and laurelled Emperors,
Radical-butchers, Paper-money-millers,
Bishops and deacons, and the entire army
Of those fat martyrs to the persecution
Of stifling turtle-soup, and brandy-devils,
Offer their secret vows! Thou plenteous
Ceres
Of their Eleusis, hail!

THE SWINE

Eigh! eigh! eigh! eigh!

* See Universal History for an account of the number of people who died, and the immense consumption of garlic by the wretched Egyptians, who made a sepulchre for the name as well as the bodies of their tyrants.

Œdipus Tyrannus

SWELLFOOT

Ha ! what are ye,
Who, crowned with leaves devoted to the
Furies,
Cling round this sacred shrine ?

SWINE

Aigh ! aigh ! aigh !

SWELLFOOT

What ! ye that are
The very beasts that offered at her altar
With blood and groans, salt-cake, and fat, and
inwards
Ever propitiate her reluctant will
When taxes are withheld ?

SWINE

Ugh ! ugh ! ugh !

SWELLFOOT

What ! ye who grub
With filthy snouts my red potatoes up

Œdipus Tyrannus

In Allan's rushy bog? Who eat the oats
Up, from my cavalry in the Hebrides?
Who swill the hog-wash soup my cooks digest
From bones, and rags, and scraps of shoe-leather,
Which should be given to cleaner Pigs than
you?

THE SWINE. — SEMICHORUS I.

The same, alas! the same;
Though only now the name
Of pig remains to me.

SEMICHORUS II.

If 'twere your kingly will
Us wretched swine to kill,
What should we yield to thee?

SWELLFOOT

Why skin and bones, and some few hairs for
mortar.

CHORUS OF SWINE

I have heard your Laureate sing,
That pity was a royal thing;

Œdipus Tyrannus

Under your mighty ancestors, we pigs
Were bless'd as nightingales on myrtle sprigs,
Or grasshoppers that live on noonday dew,
And sung, old annals tell, as sweetly too,
But now our styes are fallen in, we catch
 The murrain and the mange, the scab and
 itch ;
Sometimes your royal dogs tear down our thatch,
 And then we seek the shelter of a ditch ;
Hog-wash or grains, or ruta бага, none
Has yet been ours since your reign begun.

FIRST SOW

My pigs, 'tis in vain to tug.

SECOND SOW

I could almost eat my litter.

FIRST PIG

I suck, but no milk will come from the dug.

SECOND PIG

Our skin and our bones would be bitter.

Œdipus Tyrannus

THE BOARS

We fight for this rag of greasy rug,
Though a trough of wash would be fitter.

SEMICHORUS

Happier swine were they than we,
Drowned in the Gadarean sea —
I wish that pity would drive out the devils,
Which in your royal bosom hold their revels,
And sink us in the waves of thy compassion!
Alas! the Pigs are an unhappy nation!
Now if your Majesty would have our bristles
To bind your mortar with, or fill our colons
With rich blood, or make brawn out of our
gristles,
In policy — ask else your royal Solons —
You ought to give us hog-wash and clean straw,
And styes well thatched; besides it is the law!

SWELLFOOT

This is sedition, and rank blasphemy!
Ho! there, my guards!

Œdipus Tyrannus

Enter a GUARD.

GUARD

Your sacred Majesty.

SWELLFOOT

Call in the Jews, Solomon the court porkman,
Moses, the sow-gelder, and Zephaniah
The hog-butcher.

GUARD

They are in waiting, Sire.

Enter SOLOMON, MOSES, *and* ZEPHANIAH.

SWELLFOOT

Out with your knife, old Moses, and spay
those sows,

[The pigs run about in consternation.]

That load the earth with pigs; cut close and deep,
Moral restraint I see has no effect,
Nor prostitution, nor our own example,
Starvation, typhus-fever, war, nor prison —

Œdipus Tyrannus

This was the art which the arch-priest of
Famine
Hinted at in his charge to the Theban clergy —
Cut close and deep, good Moses.

MOSES

Let your Majesty
Keep the boars quiet, else —

SWELLFOOT

Zephaniah, cut
That fat hog's throat, the brute seems overfed ;
Seditious hunks ! to whine for want of grains.

ZEPHANIAH

Your sacred Majesty, he has the dropsy ; —
We shall find pints of hydatids in's liver,
He has not half an inch of wholesome fat
Upon his carious ribs —

SWELLFOOT

'Tis all the same,
He'll serve instead of riot money, when

Œdipus Tyrannus

Our murmuring troops bivouac in Thebes'
streets ;
And January winds, after a day
Of butchering, will make them relish carrion.
Now, Solomon, I'll sell you in a lump
The whole kit of them.

SOLOMON

Why, your Majesty,
I could not give —

SWELLFOOT

Kill them out of the way,
That shall be price enough, and let me hear
Their everlasting grunts and whines no more !
[Exeunt, driving in the swine.]

Enter MAMMON, the Arch-Priest ; and PURGANAX, Chief of the Council of Wizards.

PURGANAX

The future looks as black as death, a cloud,
Dark as the frown of Hell, hangs over it —

Œdipus Tyrannus

The troops grow mutinous — the revenue
fails —

There's something rotten in us — for the level
Of the State slopes, its very bases topple,
The boldest turn their backs upon themselves !

MAMMON

Why, what's the matter, my dear fellow,
now ?

Do the troops mutiny ? — decimate some regi-
ments ;

Does money fail ? — come to my mint — coin
paper,

Till gold be at a discount, and ashamed
To show his bilious face, go purge himself,
In emulation of her vestal whiteness.

PURGANAX

Oh, would that this were all ! The oracle !

MAMMON

Why it was I who spoke that oracle,
And whether I was dead drunk or inspired,

Œdipus Tyrannus

I cannot well remember ; nor, in truth,
The oracle itself!

PURGANAX

The words went thus :—

“ Bœotia, choose reform or civil war !
When through thy streets, instead of hare with
dogs,
A Consort Queen shall hunt a King with
hogs,
Riding on the Ionian Minotaur.”

MAMMON

Now if the oracle had ne'er foretold
This sad alternative, it must arrive,
Or not, and so it must now that it has,
And whether I was urged by grace divine,
Or Lesbian liquor, to declare these words,
Which must, as all words must, be false or
true,
It matters not : for the same power made all,
Oracle, wine, and me and you — or none —
'Tis the same thing. If you knew as much
Of oracles as I do —

Œdipus Tyrannus

PURGANAX

You arch-priests
Believe in nothing; if you were to dream
Of a particular number in the Lottery,
You would not buy the ticket?

MAMMON

Yet our tickets
Are seldom blanks. But what steps have you
taken?
For prophecies when once they get abroad,
Like liars who tell the truth to serve their ends,
Or hypocrites who, from assuming virtue,
Do the same actions that the virtuous do,
Contrive their own fulfilment. This Iona —
Well — you know what the chaste Pasiphae did,
Wife to that most religious King of Crete,
And still how popular the tale is here;
And these dull swine of Thebes boast their
descent
From the free Minotaur. You know they
still

Œdipus Tyrannus

Call themselves Bulls, though thus degenerate,
And everything relating to a bull
Is popular and respectable in Thebes.
Their arms are seven bulls in a field gules,
They think their strength consists in eating
beef,—
Now there were danger in the precedent
If Queen Iona —

PURGANAX

I have taken good care
That shall not be. I struck the crust o' the
earth
With this enchanted rod, and Hell lay bare!
And from a cavern full of ugly shapes,
I chose a LEECH, a GADFLY, and a RAT.
The gadfly was the same which Juno sent
To agitate Io,¹ and which Ezekiel² mentions
That the Lord whistled for out of the moun-
tains
Of utmost Æthiopia, to torment

¹ The Prometheus Bound of Æschylus.

² And the Lord whistled for the gadfly out of Æthiopia, and for the bee of Egypt, etc. — *Ezekiel*.

Œdipus Tyrannus

Mesopotamian Babylon. The beast
Has a loud trumpet like the Scarabee,
His crookèd tail is barbed with many
stings,
Each able to make a thousand wounds, and
each

Immedicable; from his convex eyes
He sees fair things in many hideous shapes,
And trumpets all his falsehood to the world.
Like other beetles he is fed on dung —
He has eleven feet with which he crawls,
Trailing a blistering slime, and this foul
beast

Has tracked Iona from the Theban limits,
From isle to isle, from city unto city,
Urging her flight from the far Chersonese
To fabulous Solyma, and the Ætnean Isle,
Ortygia, Melite, and Calypso's Rock,
And the swart tribes of Garamant and Fez,
Æolia and Elysium, and thy shores,
Parthenope, which now, alas! are free!
And through the fortunate Saturnian land,
Into the darkness of the West.

Œdipus Tyrannus

MAMMON

But if
This Gadfly should drive Iona hither ?

PURGANAX

Gods ! what an *if!* but there is my gray RAT :
So thin with want, he can crawl in and out
Of any narrow chink and filthy hole,
And he shall creep into her dressing-room,
And —

MAMMON

My dear friend, where are your wits ? as if
She does not always toast a piece of cheese
And bait the trap ? and rats, when lean enough
To crawl through *such* chinks —

PURGANAX

But my LEECH — a leech
Fit to suck blood, with lubricous round rings,
Capaciously expatiative, which make
His little body like a red balloon,
As full of blood as that of hydrogene,

Œdipus Tyrannus

And have entailed my estate, called the Fool's
Paradise,
And funds in fairy-money, bonds, and bills,
Upon my accomplished daughter Banknotina,
And married her to the gallows.¹

PURGANAX

A good match!

MAMMON

A high connection, Purganax. The bride-
groom
Is of a very ancient family,
Of Hounslow Heath, Tyburn, and the New
Drop,
And has great influence in both Houses; — oh!
He makes the fondest husband; nay, *too*
fond, —
New married people should not kiss in public;
But the poor souls love one another so!
And then my little grandchildren, the gibbets,
Promising children as you ever saw, —

¹ "If one should marry a gallows, and beget young gibbets,
I never saw one so prone." — *Cymbeline*.

Œdipus Tyrannus

The young playing at hanging, the elder learning
How to hold radicals. They are well taught
too,
For every gibbet says its catechism
And reads a select chapter in the Bible
Before it goes to play.

[A most tremendous bumming is heard.]

PURGANAX

Ha! what do I hear?

Enter the GADFLY.

MAMMON

Your gadfly, as it seems, is tired of gadding.

GADFLY

Hum! hum! hum!
From the lakes of the Alps, and the cold gray
scalps
Of the mountains, I come,
Hum! hum! hum!

Œdipus Tyrannus

From Morocco and Fez, and the high palaces
Of golden Byzantium ;
From the temples divine of old Palestine,
From Athens and Rome,
With a ha ! and a hum !
I come ! I come !

All inn-doors and windows
Were open to me :
I saw all that sin does,
Which lamps hardly see
That burn in the night by the curtained bed, —
The impudent lamps ! for they blushed not red,
Dinging and singing,
From slumber I rung her,
Loud as the clank of an ironmonger ;
Hum ! hum ! hum !

Far, far, far !
With the trump of my lips, and the sting at my
hips,
I drove her — afar !
Far, far, far !

Œdipus Tyrannus

From city to city, abandoned of pity,
A ship without needle or star ;—
Homeless she past, like a cloud on the blast,
Seeking peace, finding war ;—
She is here in her car,
From afar, and afar ;—
Hum ! hum !

I have stung her and wrung her,
The venom is working ;—
And if you had hung her
With canting and quirking,
She could not be deader than she will be soon ;—
I have driven her close to you, under the moon,
Night and day, hum ! hum ! ha !
I have hummed her and drummed her
From place to place, till at last I have dumbbed
her
Hum ! hum ! hum !

LEECH

I will suck
Blood or muck !

Œdipus Tyrannus

The disease of the state is a plethory,
Who so fit to reduce it as I ?

RAT

I'll silyly seize and
Let blood from her weasand, —
Creeping through crevice, and chink, and
cranny,
With my snakey tail, and my sides so scranny.

PURGANAX

Aroint ye ! thou unprofitable worm !

[To the Leech.]

And thou, dull beetle, get thee back to hell !

[To the Gadfly.]

To sting the ghosts of Babylonian kings,
And the ox-headed Io —

SWINE (*witbin*)

Ugh, ugh, ugh !

Hail ! Iona the divine,

We will be no longer swine,

But bulls with horns and dewlaps.

CEdipus Tyrannus

RAT

For,
You know, my lord, the Minotaur —

PURGANAX (*fiercely*)

Be silent! get to hell! or I will call
The cat out of the kitchen. Well, Lord Mam-
mon,
This is a pretty business. [*Exit the Rat.*]

MAMMON

I will go
And spell some scheme to make it ugly
then. — [*Exit.*]

Enter SWELLFOOT.

SWELLFOOT

She is returned! Taurina is in Thebes
When Swellfoot wishes that she were in hell!
O Hymen, clothed in yellow jealousy,
And waving o'er the couch of wedded kings
The torch of discord with its fiery hair;

CEdipus Tyrannus

This is thy work, thou patron saint of queens !
Swellfoot is wived ! though parted by the sea,
The very name of wife had conjugal rights ;
Her cursèd image ate, drank, slept with me,
And in the arms of Adiposa oft
Her memory has received a husband's —
 [*A loud tumult, and cries of " Iona for
 ever ! — No Swellfoot ! "*]

SWELLFOOT

Hark !

How the swine cry Iona Taurina ;
I suffer the real presence ; Purganax,
Off with her head !

PURGANAX

But I must first impanel
A jury of the pigs.

SWELLFOOT

Pack them then.

PURGANAX

Or fattening some few in two separate styes,
And giving them clean straw, tying some bits

Œdipus Tyrannus

Of ribbon round their legs — giving their sows
Some tawdry lace, and bits of lustre glass,
And their young boars white and red rags, and
tails

Of cows, and jay feathers, and sticking cauli-
flowers

Between the ears of the old ones ; and when
They are persuaded, that by the inherent virtue
Of these things, they are all imperial pigs,
Good Lord ! they'd rip each other's bellies
up,

Not to say help us in destroying her.

SWELLFOOT

This plan might be tried too ; — where's Gen-
eral

Laoctonos ?

Enter LAOCTONOS and DAKRY.

It is my royal pleasure
That you, Lord General, bring the head and
body,

Œdipus Tyrannus

If separate it would please me better, hither
Of Queen Iona.

LAOCTONOS

That pleasure I well knew,
And made a charge with those battalions bold,
Called, from their dress and grin, the royal
apes,

Upon the swine, who, in a hollow square
Enclosed her, and received the first attack
Like so many rhinoceroses, and then
Retreating in good order, with bare tusks
And wrinkled snouts presented to the foe,
Bore her in triumph to the public stye.
What is still worse, some sows upon the ground
Have given the ape-guards apples, nuts, and
gin,

And they all whisk their tails aloft, and cry,
“ Long live Iona ! down with Swellfoot ! ”

PURGANAX

Hark !

THE SWINE (*without*)

Long live Iona ! down with Swellfoot !

Œdipus Tyrannus

DAKRY

I

Went to the garret of the swineherd's tower,
Which overlooks the sty, and made a long
Harangue (all words) to the assembled swine,
Of delicacy, mercy, judgment, law,
Morals, and precedents, and purity,
Adultery, destitution, and divorce,
Piety, faith, and state necessity,
And how I loved the Queen!—and then I
wept

With the pathos of my own eloquence,
And every tear turned to a millstone, which
Brained many a gaping pig, and there was
made

A slough of blood and brains upon the place,
Greased with the pounded bacon; round and
round

The millstones rolled, ploughing the pave-
ment up,
And hurling sucking pigs into the air,
With dust and stones. —

Œdipus Tyrannus

Enter MAMMON.

MAMMON

I wonder that gray wizards
Like you should be so beardless in their
schemes ;

It had been but a point of policy
To keep Iona and the swine apart.
Divide and rule ! but ye have made a junction

Between two parties who will govern you
But for my art. — Behold this BAG ! it is
The poison BAG of that Green Spider huge,
On which our spies skulked in ovation through
The streets of Thebes, when they were paved
with dead :

A bane so much the deadlier fills it now,
As calumny is worse than death, — for here
The Gadfly's venom, fifty times distilled,
Is mingled with the vomit of the Leech,
In due proportion, and black ratsbane, which
That very Rat, who, like the Pontic tyrant,
Nurtures himself on poison, dare not touch ; —

Œdipus Tyrannus

All is sealed up with the broad seal of Fraud,
Who is the Devil's Lord High Chancellor,
And over it the Primate of all Hell
Murmured this pious baptism: — "Be thou
called
The GREEN BAG; and this power and grace
be thine:

That thy contents, on whomsoever poured,
Turn innocence to guilt, and gentlest looks
To savage, foul, and fierce deformity.
Let all baptized by thy infernal dew
Be called adulterer, drunkard, liar, wretch!
No name left out which orthodoxy loves,
Court Journal or legitimate Review! —
Be they called tyrant, beast, fool, glutton,
lover

Of other wives and husbands than their own —
The heaviest sin on this side of the Alps!
Wither they to a ghastly caricature
Of what was human! — let not man or beast
Behold their face with unaverted eyes!
Or hear their names with ears that tingle not
With blood of indignation, rage, and shame!" —

Œdipus Tyrannus

This is a perilous liquor ; — good my Lords. —

[SWELLFOOT *approaches to touch the*
GREEN BAG.

Beware! for God's sake, beware! — if you
should break

The seal, and touch the fatal liquor —

PURGANAX

There,

Give it to me. I have been used to handle
All sorts of poisons. His dread Majesty
Only desires to see the colour of it.

MAMMON

Now, with a little common sense, my Lords,
Only undoing all that has been done
(Yet so as it may seem we but confirm it),
Our victory is assured. We must entice
Her Majesty from the sty, and make the pigs
Believe that the contents of the GREEN
BAG

Are the true test of guilt or innocence.
And that, if she be guilty, 'twill transform her

Oedipus Tyrannus

To manifest deformity like guilt.
If innocent, she will become transfigured
Into an angel, such as they say she is ;
And they will see her flying through the air,
So bright that she will dim the noonday sun ;
Showering down blessings in the shape of
comfits.

This, trust a priest, is just the sort of thing
Swine will believe. I'll wager you will see
them

Climbing upon the thatch of their low styes,
With pieces of smoked glass, to watch her
sail

Among the clouds, and some will hold the
flaps

Of one another's ears between their teeth,
To catch the coming hail of comfits in.
You, Purganax, who have the gift o' the gab,
Make them a solemn speech to this effect :
I go to put in readiness the feast
Kept to the honour of our goddess Famine,
Where, for more glory, let the ceremony
Take place of the uglification of the Queen.

Cedipus Tyrannus

DAKRY (*to Swellfoot*)

I, as the keeper of your sacred conscience,
Humbly remind your Majesty that the care
Of your high office, as man-milliner
To red Bellona, should not be deferred.

PURGANAX

All part, in happier plight to meet again.

[*Exeunt.*]





ACT II.

SCENE I.—*The Public Stye. The Boars in full Assembly.*

Enter PURGANAX.

PURGANAX



RANT me your patience, Gentle-
men and Boars,
Ye, by whose patience under pub-
lic burthens

The glorious constitution of these styes
Subsists, and shall subsist. The lean-pig rates
Grow with the growing populace of swine,
The taxes, that true source of piggishness,
(How can I find a more appropriate term
To include religion, morals, peace, and plenty,
And all that fit Bœotia as a nation

Œdipus Tyrannus

To teach the other nations how to live?)
Increase with piggishness itself; and still
Does the revenue, that great spring of all
The patronage, and pensions, and by-payments,
Which free-born pigs regard with jealous eyes,
Diminish, till at length, by glorious steps,
All the land's produce will be merged in taxes,
And the revenue will amount to — nothing!
The failure of a foreign market for
Sausages, bristles, and blood-puddings,
And such home manufactures, is but partial;
And, that the population of the pigs,
Instead of hog-wash, has been fed on straw
And water, is a fact which is — you know —
That is — it is a state-necessity —
Temporary, of course. Those impious pigs,
Who, by frequent squeaks, have dared impugn
The settled Swellfoot system, or to make
Irreverent mockery of the genuflexions
Inculcated by the arch-priest, have been whipt
Into a loyal and an orthodox whine.
Things being in this happy state, the Queen
Iona —

Œdipus Tyrannus

[*A loud cry from the PIGS.*
She is innocent! most innocent!

PURGANAX

That is the very thing that I was saying,
Gentlemen Swine; the Queen Iona being
Most innocent, no doubt, returns to Thebes,
And the lean sows and boars collect about her,
Wishing to make her think that we believe
(I mean those more substantial pigs, who swill
Rich hog-wash, while the others mouth damp
straw)

That she is guilty; thus, the lean-pig faction
Seeks to obtain that hog-wash, which has been
Your immemorial right, and which I will
Maintain you in to the last drop of—

A BOAR (*interrupting him*)

What

Does any one accuse her of?

PURGANAX

Why, no one
Makes *any* positive accusation; — but

Œdipus Tyrannus

There were hints dropt, and so the privy wizards

Conceived that it became them to advise
His Majesty to investigate their truth ; —
Not for his own sake ; he could be content
To let his wife play any pranks she pleased,
If, by that sufferance, *he* could please the pigs ;
But then he fears the morals of the swine,
The sows especially, and what effect
It might produce upon the purity and
Religion of the rising generation
Of sucking pigs, if it could be suspected
That Queen Iona — [*A pause.*

FIRST BOAR

Well, go on ; we long
To hear what she can possibly have done.

PURGANAX

Why, it is hinted, that a certain bull —
Thus much is *known* : — the milk-white bulls
that feed
Beside Clitumnus and the crystal lakes

Œdipus Tyrannus

Of the Cisalpine mountains, in fresh dews
Of lotus-grass and blossoming asphodel,
Sleeking their silken hair, and with sweet breath
Loading the morning winds until they faint
With living fragrance, are so beautiful! —
Well, *I* say nothing; — but Europa rode
On such a one from Asia into Crete,
And the enamoured sea grew calm beneath
His gliding beauty. And Pasiphae,
Iona's grandmother, — but *she* is innocent!
And that both you and I, and all assert.

FIRST BOAR

Most innocent!

PURGANAX

Behold this BAG; a bag —

SECOND BOAR

Oh! no GREEN BAGS! Jealousy's eyes
are green,
Scorpions are green, and water-snakes, and efts,
And verdigris, and —

Cedipus Tyrannus

PURGANAX

Honourable swine,
In piggish souls can prepossessions reign?
Allow me to remind you, grass is green —
All flesh is grass; — no bacon but is flesh —
Ye are but bacon. This divining BAG
(Which is not green, but only bacon colour)
Is filled with liquor, which if sprinkled o'er
A woman guilty of — we all know what —
Makes her so hideous, till she finds one
blind

She never can commit the like again.
If innocent, she will turn into an angel,
And rain down blessings in the shape of com-
fits

As she flies up to heaven. Now, my proposal
Is to convert her sacred Majesty
Into an angel (as I am sure we shall do),
By pouring on her head this mystic water.

[Showing the Bag.]

I know that she is innocent; I wish
Only to prove her so to all the world.

Eclipse TYPHOON

FIRST BOAR

Excellent, just, and noble Purganax.

SECOND BOAR

How glorious it will be to see her Majesty
Flying above our heads, her petticoats
Streaming like — Eke — Eke —

THIRD BOAR

Anything.

PURGANAX

Oh, no!

But like a standard of an admiral's ship,
Or like the banner of a conquering host,
Or like a cloud dyed in the dying day,
Unravell'd on the blast from a white mountain;
Or like a meteor, or a war-steed's name,
Or waterfall from a dizzy precipice
Scattered upon the wind.

FIRST BOAR

Or a cow's tail.

Œdipus Tyrannus

SECOND BOAR

Or *anything*, as the learned Boar observed.

PURGANAX

Gentlemen Boars, I move a resolution,
That her most sacred Majesty should be
Invited to attend the feast of Famine,
And to receive upon her chaste white body
Dews of Apotheosis from this BAG.

[A great confusion is heard of the PIGS OUT OF DOORS, which communicates itself to those within. During the first Strophe, the doors of the Sty are staved in, and a number of exceedingly lean PIGS and SOWS and BOARS rush in.]

SEMICHORUS I.

No! Yes!

SEMICHORUS II.

Yes! No!

Oedipus Tyrannus

SEMICHORUS I.

A law!

SEMICHORUS II.

A flaw!

SEMICHORUS I.

Porkers, we shall lose our wash,
Or must share it with the lean pigs!

FIRST BOAR

Order! order! be not rash!
Was there ever such a scene, Figs!

AN OLD SOW (*rushing in*)

I never saw so fine a dash
Since I first began to wean pigs.

SECOND BOAR (*solemnly*)

The Queen will be an angel time enough.
I vote, in form of an amendment, that
Purganax rub a little of that stuff
Upon his face.

Œdipus Tyrannus

PURGANAX

(His heart is seen to beat through his waistcoat.)

Gods! What would ye be at?

SEMICHORUS I.

Purganax has plainly shown a
Cloven foot and jackdaw feather.

SEMICHORUS II.

I vote Swellfoot and Iona
Try the magic test together ;
Whenever royal spouses bicker,
Both should try the magic liquor.

AN OLD BOAR *(aside)*

A miserable state is that of pigs,
For if their drivers would tear caps and
wigs,
The swine must bite each other's ear therefore.

AN OLD SOW *(aside)*

A wretched lot Jove has assigned to swine,

Œdipus Tyrannus

Squabbling makes pig-herds hungry, and
they dine
On bacon, and whip sucking-pigs the more.

CHORUS

Hog-wash has been ta'en away :
If the Bull-Queen is divested,
We shall be in every way
Hunted, stript, exposed, molested ;
Let us do whate'er we may,
That she shall not be arrested.

QUEEN, we entrench you with walls of brawn,
And palisades of tusks, sharp as a bayonet :
Place your most sacred person here. We pawn
Our lives that none a finger dare to lay on it.
Those who wrong you, wrong us ;
Those who hate you, hate us ;
Those who sting you, sting us ;
Those who bait you, bait us ;
The *oracle* is now about to be
Fulfilled by circumvolving destiny ;
Which says : " Thebes, choose *reform* or *civil*
war,

Cedipus Tyrannus

When through your streets, instead of hare
with dogs,
A CONSORT QUEEN shall hunt a KING with
hogs,
Riding upon the IONIAN MINOTAUR."

Enter IONA TAURINA.

IONA TAURINA (*coming forward*)

Gentlemen swine, and gentle lady-pigs,
The tender heart of every boar acquits
Their QUEEN of any act incongruous
With native piggishness, and she, reposing
With confidence upon the grunting nation,
Has thrown herself, her cause, her life, her all,
Her innocence, into their hoggish arms ;
Nor has the expectation been deceived
Of finding shelter there. Yet know, great
boars

(For such who ever lives among you finds you,
And so do I), the innocent are proud !
I have accepted your protection only
In compliment of your kind love and care,

Œdipus Tyrannus

Not for necessity. The innocent
Are safest there where trials and dangers wait;
Innocent Queens o'er white-hot ploughshares
tread

Unsing'd, and ladies, Erin's laureate sings it,¹
Decked with rare gems, and beauty rarer still,
Walked from Killarney to the Giant's Cause-
way,

Through rebels, smugglers, troops of yeo-
manry,

White-boys and orange-boys, and constables,
Tithe-proctors, and excise people, uninjured!
Thus I! —

Lord PURGANAX, I do commit myself
Into your custody, and am prepared
To stand the test, whatever it may be!

PURGANAX

This magnanimity in your sacred Majesty
Must please the pigs. You cannot fail of being
A heavenly angel. Smoke your bits of glass,

¹ "Rich and rare were the gems she wore." See Moore's
"Irish Melodies."

Œdipus Tyrannus

Ye loyal swine, or her transfiguration
Will blind your wondering eyes.

AN OLD BOAR (*aside*)

Take care, my Lord,
They do not smoke you first.

PURGANAX

At the approaching feast
Of Famine, let the expiation be.

SWINE

Content! content!

IONA TAURINA (*aside*)

I, most content of all,
Know that my foes even thus prepare their
fall! [*Exeunt omnes.*

SCENE II.— *The interior of the Temple of Famine. The statue of the Goddess, a skeleton clothed in party-coloured rags, seated upon a heap of skulls and loaves intermingled. A*

Œdipus Tyrannus

number of exceedingly fat Priests in black garments arrayed on each side, with marrow-bones and cleavers in their hands. A flourish of trumpets.

Enter MAMMON as arch-priest, SWELLFOOT, DAKRY, PURGANAX, LAOCTONOS, followed by IONA TAURINA guarded. On the other side enter the SWINE.

CHORUS OF PRIESTS

Accompanied by the Court Porkman on marrow-bones and cleavers.

GODDESS bare, and gaunt, and pale,
Empress of the world, all hail!
What though Cretans old called thee
City-crested Cybele?
We call thee FAMINE!
Goddess of fasts and feasts, starving and cram-
ming!
Through thee, for emperors, kings, and priests
and lords,

Œdipus Tyrannus

Who rule by viziers, sceptres, bank-notes,
words,

The earth pours forth its plenteous fruits,
Corn, wool, linen, flesh, and roots —

Those who consume these fruits thro' thee
grow fat,

Those who produce these fruits thro' thee
grow lean,

Whatever change takes place, oh, stick to
that!

And let things be as they have ever
been ;

At least while we remain thy priests,
And proclaim thy fasts and feasts !

Through thee the sacred SWELLFOOT dynasty
Is based upon a rock amid that sea

Whose waves are swine — so let it ever be !

*[SWELLFOOT, etc., seat themselves at a table
magnificently covered at the upper end
of the temple. Attendants pass over the
stage with hog-wash in pails. A number
of pigs, exceedingly lean, follow them lick-
ing up the wash.]*

Œdipus Tyrannus

MAMMON

I fear your sacred Majesty has lost
The appetite which you were used to have.
Allow me now to recommend this dish —
A simple kickshaw by your Persian cook,
Such as is served at the great King's second
table.

The price and pains which its ingredients cost
Might have maintained some dozen families
A winter or two — not more — so plain a
dish
Could scarcely disagree.

SWELLFOOT

After the trial,
And these fastidious pigs are gone, perhaps
I may recover my lost appetite, —
I feel the gout flying about my stomach —
Give me a glass of Maraschino punch.

PURGANAX (*filling his glass, and standing up*)
The glorious constitution of the Pigs!

Œdipus Tyrannus

ALL

A toast! a toast! stand up and three times
three!

DAKRY

No heel-taps — darken daylight! —

LAOCTONOS

Claret, somehow,
Puts me in mind of blood, and blood of claret!

SWELLFOOT

Laoctonos is fishing for a compliment,
But 'tis his due. Yes, you have drunk more
wine,
And shed more blood than any man in
Thebes.

[To PURGANAX.

For God's sake stop the grunting of those pigs!

PURGANAX

We dare not, Sire, 'tis Famine's privilege.

Œdipus Tyrannus

CHORUS OF SWINE

Hail to thee, hail to thee, Famine !
Thy throne is on blood, and thy robe is
of rags ;
Thou devil which livest on damning ;
Saint of new churches, and cant, and
GREEN BAGS,
Till in pity and terror thou risest,
Confounding the schemes of the wisest,
When thou liftest thy skeleton form,
When the loaves and the skulls roll
about,
We will greet thee — the voice of a storm
Would be lost in our terrible shout !

Then hail to thee, hail to thee, Famine !
Hail to thee, Empress of Earth !
When thou risest, dividing possessions ;
When thou risest, uprooting oppression ;
In the pride of thy ghastly mirth.
Over palaces, temples, and graves,
We will rush as thy minister-slaves,

Œdipus Tyrannus

Trampling behind in thy train,
Till all be made level again !

MAMMON

I hear a crackling of the giant bones
Of the dread image, and in the black pits
Which once were eyes, I see two livid flames.
These prodigies are oracular, and show
The presence of the unseen Deity.
Mighty events are hastening to their doom !

SWELLFOOT

I only hear the lean and mutinous swine
Grunting about the temple.

DAKRY

In a crisis
Of such exceeding delicacy, I think
We ought to put her Majesty, the QUEEN,
Upon her trial without delay.

MAMMON

Is here.

THE BAG

Œdipus Tyrannus

CHORUS OF SWINE

Hail to thee, hail to thee, Famine !
Thy throne is on blood, and thy robe is
of rags ;
Thou devil which livest on damning ;
Saint of new churches, and cant, and
GREEN BAGS,
Till in pity and terror thou risest,
Confounding the schemes of the wisest,
When thou liftest thy skeleton form,
When the loaves and the skulls roll
about,
We will greet thee — the voice of a storm
Would be lost in our terrible shout !

Then hail to thee, hail to thee, Famine !
Hail to thee, Empress of Earth !
When thou risest, dividing possessions ;
When thou risest, uprooting oppression ;
In the pride of thy ghastly mirth.
Over palaces, temples, and graves,
We will rush as thy minister-slaves,

Œdipus Tyrannus

Trampling behind in thy train,
Till all be made level again !

MAMMON

I hear a crackling of the giant bones
Of the dread image, and in the black pits
Which once were eyes, I see two livid flames.
These prodigies are oracular, and show
The presence of the unseen Deity.
Mighty events are hastening to their doom !

SWELLFOOT

I only hear the lean and mutinous swine
Grunting about the temple.

DAKRY

In a crisis
Of such exceeding delicacy, I think
We ought to put her Majesty, the **QUEEN**,
Upon her trial without delay.

MAMMON

Is here.

THE BAG

Œdipus Tyrannus

PURGANAX

I have rehearsed the entire scene
With an ox bladder and some ditch-water,
On Lady P. — it cannot fail. (*Taking up the
bag.*) Your Majesty [*To SWELLFOOT.*
In such a filthy business had better
Stand on one side, lest it should sprinkle you,
A spot or two on me would do no harm,
Nay, it might hide the blood, which the sad
genius
Of the Green Isle has fixed, as by a spell,
Upon my brow — which would stain all its
seas,
But which those seas could never wash away!

IONA TAURINA

My Lord, I am ready — nay, I am impatient
To undergo the test.

*[A graceful figure in a semitransparent veil
passes unnoticed through the Temple; the
word LIBERTY is seen through the veil,
as if it were written in fire upon its fore-*

Œdipus Tyrannus

head. Its words are almost drowned in the furious grunting of the PIGS, and the business of the trial. She kneels on the steps of the Altar, and speaks in tones at first faint and low, but which ever become louder and louder.

Mighty Empress! Death's white wife!
Ghastly mother-in-law of life!
By the God who made thee such,
By the magic of thy touch,
By the starving and the cramming,
Of fasts and feasts! by thy dread self, O
Famine!

I charge thee! when thou wake the multitude
Thou lead them not upon the paths of blood.
The earth did never mean her foison
For those who crown life's cup with poison
Of fanatic rage and meaningless revenge —
But for those radiant spirits, who are still
The standard-bearers in the van of Change.

Be they th' appointed stewards, to fill
The lap of Pain, and toil, and Age! —
Remit, O Queen! thy accustomed rage!

Œdipus Tyrannus

Be what thou art not! In voice faint and low
FREEDOM calls *Famine*, — her eternal foe,
To brief alliance, hollow truce. — Rise now!

[*Whilst the Veiled Figure has been chaunting this strophe, MAMMON, DAKRY, LAOC-TONOS, and SWELLFOOT have surrounded IONA TAURINA, who, with her hands folded on her breast, and her eyes lifted to Heaven, stands, as with saintlike resignation, to wait the issue of the business, in perfect confidence of her innocence.*

[*PURGANAX, after unsealing the GREEN BAG, is gravely about to pour the liquor upon her head, when suddenly the whole expression of her figure and countenance changes; she snatches it from his hand with a loud laugh of triumph, and empties it over SWELLFOOT and his whole Court, who are instantly changed into a number of filthy and ugly animals, and rush out of the Temple. The image of FAMINE then arises with a tremendous sound, the PIGS*

Œdipus Tyrannus

begin scrambling for the loaves, and are tripped up by the skulls; all those who eat the loaves are turned into BULLS, and arrange themselves quietly behind the altar. The image of FAMINE sinks through a chasm in the earth, and a MINOTAUR rises.

MINOTAUR

I am the Ionian Minotaur, the mightiest
Of all Europa's taurine progeny —
I am the old traditional man-bull;
And from my ancestors having been Ionian,
I am called Ion, which, by interpretation,
Is JOHN; in plain Theban, that is to say,
My name's JOHN BULL; I am a famous hunter,
And can leap any gate in all Bœotia,
Even the palings of the royal park,
Or double ditch about the new enclosures;
And if your Majesty will deign to mount
me,
At least till you have hunted down your
game,
I will not throw you.

Œdipus Tyrannus

IONA TAURINA

During this speech she has been putting on boots and spurs, and a hunting cap, buckisbly cocked on one side, and tucking up her hair, she leaps nimbly on bis back.

Hoa! hoa! tallyho! tallyho! ho! ho!
Come, let us hunt these ugly badgers down,
These stinking foxes, these devouring otters,
These hares, these wolves, these anything but
men.

Hey, for a whipper-in! my loyal pigs,
Now let your noses be as keen as beagles,
Your steps as swift as greyhounds, and your cries
More dulcet and symphonious than the bells
Of village towers, on sunshine holiday;
Wake all the dewy woods with jangling music.
Give them no law (are they not beasts of
blood?)

But such as they gave you. Tallyho! ho!
Through forest, furze, and bog, and den, and
desert,
Pursue the ugly beasts! tallyho! ho!

Œdipus Tyrannus

FULL CHORUS OF IONA AND THE SWINE

Tallyho! tallyho!
Through rain, hail, and snow,
Through brake, gorse, and briar,
Through fen, flood, and mire,
We go! we go!

Tallyho! tallyho!
Through pond, ditch, and slough.
Wind them, and find them,
Like the Devil behind them,

Tallyho! tallyho!
[*Exeunt, in full cry; IONA driving on the
SWINE with the empty GREEN BAG.*]





Note on *Œdipus Tyrannus*, by Mrs. Shelley



IN the brief journal I kept in those days, I find recorded, in August, 1820, Shelley "begins 'Swellfoot the Tyrant,' suggested by the pigs at the fair of San Giuliano." This was the period of Queen Caroline's landing in England, and the struggles made by George IV. to get rid of her claims; which failing, Lord Castlereagh placed the "*Green Bag*" on the table of the House of Commons, demanding in the king's name that an inquiry should be instituted into his wife's conduct. These circumstances were the theme of all conversation among the English. We were then at the Baths of San Giuliano. A friend came to visit

Note on Œdipus Tyrannus

us on the day when a fair was held in the square beneath our windows: Shelley read to us his "Ode to Liberty;" and was riotously accompanied by the grunting of a quantity of pigs brought for sale to the fair. He compared it to the "chorus of frogs" in the satiric drama of Aristophanes; and, it being an hour of merriment, and one ludicrous association suggesting another, he imagined a political-satirical drama on the circumstances of the day, to which the pigs would serve as chorus—and "Swellfoot" was begun. When finished it was transmitted to England, printed, and published anonymously; but stifled at the very dawn of its existence by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, who threatened to prosecute it, if not immediately withdrawn. The friend who had taken the trouble of bringing it out, of course, did not think it worth the annoyance and expense of a contest, and it was laid aside.

Hesitation of whether it would do honour to Shelley prevented my publishing it at first. But I cannot bring myself to keep back anything he ever wrote; for each word is fraught with the peculiar views and sentiments which

Note on Œdipus Tyrannus

he believed to be beneficial to the human race, and the bright light of poetry irradiates every thought. The world has a right to the entire compositions of such a man; for it does not live and thrive by the outworn lesson of the dullard or the hypocrite, but by the original free thoughts of men of genius, who aspire to pluck bright truth

“ from the pale-faced moon ;
Or dive into the bottom of the deep
Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,
And pluck up drowned ”

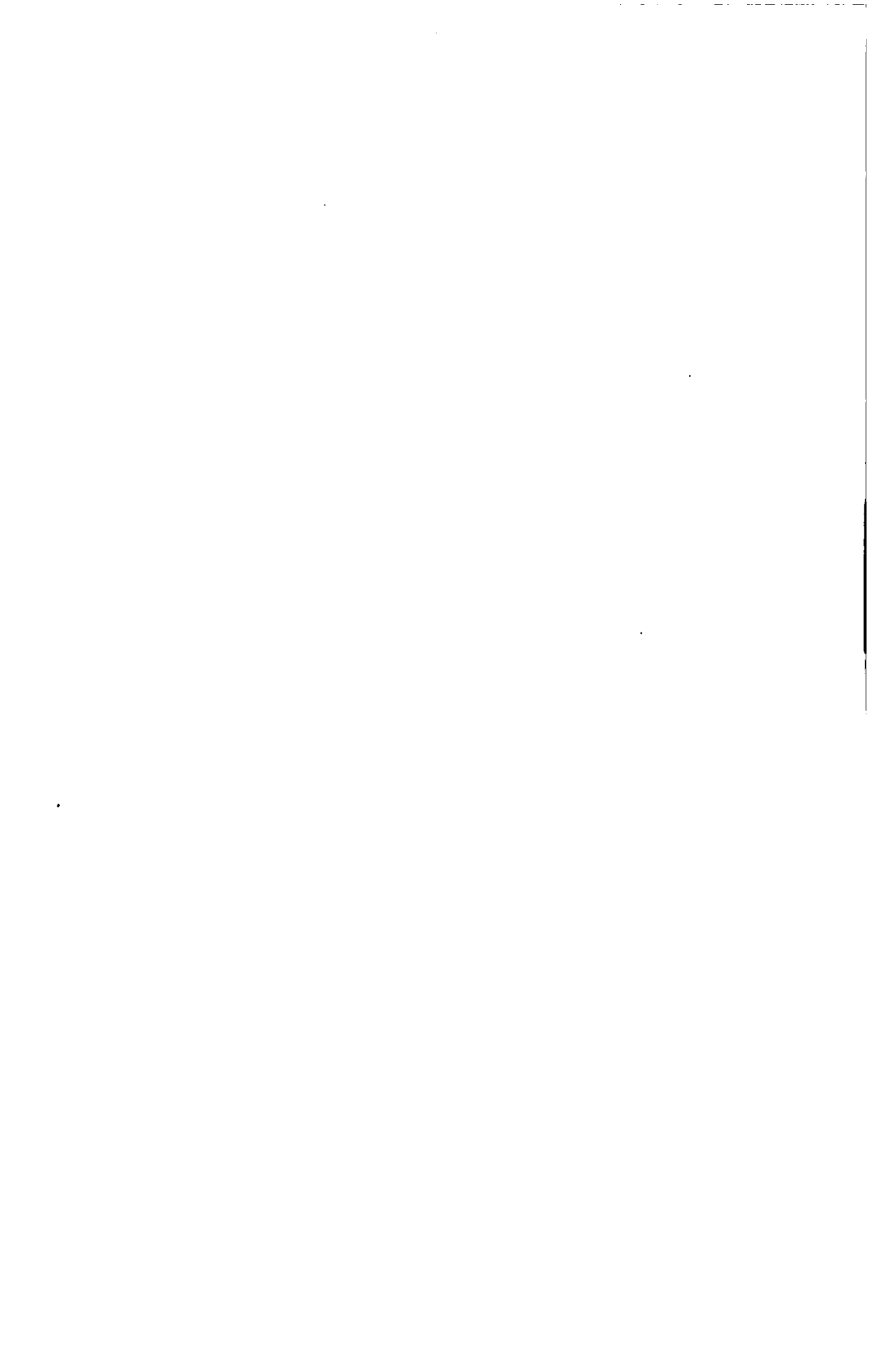
truth. Even those who may dissent from his opinions will consider that he was a man of genius, and that the world will take more interest in his slightest word than from the waters of Lethe which are so eagerly prescribed as medicinal for all its wrongs and woes. This drama, however, must not be judged for more than was meant. It is a mere plaything of the imagination; which even may not excite smiles among many, who will not see wit in those combinations of thought which were full of the ridiculous to the author. But, like everything he wrote,

Note on Œdipus Tyrannus

it breathes that deep sympathy for the sorrows of humanity, and indignation against its oppressors, which make it worthy of his name.

THE END.







[REDACTED]
3 2044 009 029 020

Shelley

826
S3
1.3
v.4

RADCLIFFE COLLEGE

Unless otherwise indicated, this book may be kept a calendar month, after which it will incur a fine of FIVE CENTS a day.

DEFACEMENT is subject to a PENALTY

~~Storage room 1~~
MM

--	--	--



